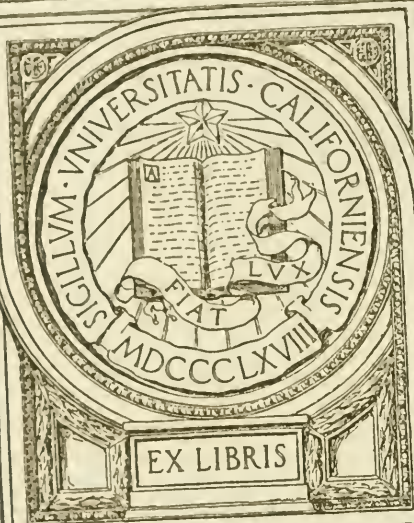




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SQUIRE SILCHESTER'S
WHIM.

BY

MORTIMER COLLINS.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

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CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

	PAGE
CHAPTER I.	
LILY LE LACHEUR CONFESSES	I
CHAPTER II.	
DINNER AT SILCHESTER	11
CHAPTER III.	
TWILIGHT, MOONLIGHT, MIDNIGHT	21
CHAPTER IV.	
THE OLD WOMAN	31
CHAPTER V.	
THE SUMMONS	44
CHAPTER VI.	
SUPPER AT THE RECTORY	57
CHAPTER VII.	
ON THE BEACH AT MOUNT ST. NICHOLAS	64
CHAPTER VIII.	
ANOTHER MIDNIGHT	72
CHAPTER IX.	
MUSICAL WILLIE'S RESOLVE	85
CHAPTER X.	
ON SILCHESTER BOWLING-GREEN	92
CHAPTER XI.	
E.C.	106

	PAGE
CHAPTER XII.	
MONSIEUR SIMONET'S CORRESPONDENTS . . .	114
CHAPTER XIII.	
THE EXODUS OF AURELIA AND KITTY . . .	123
CHAPTER XIV.	
FRIENDS IN COUNCIL	135
CHAPTER XV.	
BISCLAVERET	149
CHAPTER XVI.	
IN THE WOODS AT MIDNIGHT	166
CHAPTER XVII.	
PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT	179
CHAPTER XVIII.	
THE LADY'S TURRET	192
CHAPTER XIX.	
SQUIRE AND MARQUIS	205
CHAPTER XX.	
IN EDINBURGH	220
CHAPTER XXI.	
HYMENEAL	228
CHAPTER XXII.	
LE CHÂTEAU DE LA ROCHE SIMONET	238

SQUIRE SILCHESTER'S WHIM.

CHAPTER I.

LILY LE LACHEUR CONFESSES.

“Would you cross-examine
A lily? try to pluck the passionate secret
Out of the red heart of the July rose?
Torture the hairbell till it told its story,
Why on a hair, in some old mythic time,
A bell was set?

Then why cross-question *me*;
Plague me and torture me, and with inquisitive
Eyes mark my mode of answering?”

Old Play.

LILY LE LACHEUR was not treated like the lady whose remonstrance is quoted above; but she grew in a day or two very remorseful, quite of her own accord, after resi-

dence at Silchester. The Squire consoled Achille Gilet for the disappearance of his balloon much more easily than he could console himself for the up-tearing of some of his finest trees. The Squire treated Gilet with the courtesy due to a gentleman. Rightly, since never was there man of genius without gentle blood. Still, there was in this man's character an obvious warp, whereof the Squire could of course know nothing.

Silvia and Louisa held counsel one fine morning on these fresh arrivals. They were loitering in a rose garden which Silvia and Silvester had managed between them. *Rosa flos florum*. Nothing in the world can touch the perfect odour of the rose.

"I don't quite know what to make of this young woman from Guernsey," said Silvia. "She pretends to be wonderfully modest and quiet, but there is a kind of odd look in her eye which makes me doubtful about her. She admits she is only a shop-girl; may she not be

something worse than a shop-girl? Papa is dreadfully charitable, always believing everybody's story. But I must say I don't find he is invariably right."

"You little rebel!" said Louisa. "Why, you ought to consider your father infallible."

"I hope, for your sake," replied Silvia, that the infallibility is hereditary. You would like an infallible husband, wouldn't you?"

"I don't know. He might be slightly a bore."

"How would it be to get this girl down to the Rectory, and try to extract the truth from her?" said Silvia. "I am not clever at such things, but I really do think you might do it."

"A very good idea. Let's have her at luncheon to-morrow. My uncle is sure to be away, for he is hard at work hunting up subscriptions to rebuild his spire."

Miss Lily le Lacheur was flattered by the invitation, and came to the Rectory. There was the sort of luncheon which young ladies like—cold lamb and mint sauce, tartlets and

cheese-cakes, all sorts of dainty sweetmeats, and [forbear O Rechabite critic!] some wine that had the audacity to effervesce. That audacity of effervescence is as hideous to the abstemious and austere reviewer as the laughter of young girls to a withered old maid, or the jollity of young squib-writing Tories to a staid Whig-Radical who writes for the "blue and yellow." It is very unfortunate that the "virtuous" portion of the public cannot for the life of them abolish "cakes and ale." Doubtless it will be done some day, and we shall have a cheap breakfast-table and the reign of decorum. Licensed victuallers will be abolished in favour of unlicensed victuallers. Nobody will be allowed to have any opinions save such as the Government permits. Elysian time! when only the Eleventh Commandment [Thou shalt not be found out] will have any force.

When luncheon was over, they went into the garden, and there ensued a conversation, initiated by Louisa. They were under a noble

plane tree, the Rector's pride, and were full in view of the spire which lightning had truncated. For some time they quietly sat there enjoying the summer afternoon: then Louisa, who had been pondering over the whole affair, and wondering how best to attack this mysterious girl, said suddenly:

“Are you really Monsieur Gilet's sister?”

Lily le Lacheur was silent.

“I should like to know,” continued Louisa; “because you are so very different from each other. Besides, there is something strange in your behaviour to one another. You don't seem to me like brother and sister. Tell me the truth about it.”

Lily le Lacheur began to cry.

“Tears waste time,” said Louisa—a stern apophthegm, but one which can hardly be denied. “Come, what is your mystery? Where do you come from, and why are you here?”

Then the Guernseaise confessed that she was no relation whatsoever to the aëronaut,

but simply employed by his grandmother in her shop in the Grand Rue. Further, being carefully cross-examined by Louisa, who would have made as good a lawyer as Shakspeare's Portia, she gradually gave way, and revealed all that she knew of Walter Nugent's plot. She kept her own counsel so far as possible; but Louisa saw clearly enough the relation in which she stood to Monsieur Walter—the only name whereby she knew the scoundrel—and even Silvia guessed pretty nigh the truth.

Louisa easily connected one affair with another, and argued with herself that the rascal Nugent had some scheme connected with the balloon. What that scheme might be it was hard to guess. Louisa, thinking severely over the affair, decided that she would take counsel with Monsieur Simonet. It appeared to her that a girl like Lily le Lacheur, even though repentant, ought not to be admitted to the Squire's table, or to the company of innocent Silvia; nor did she think that Achille Gilet, man

of singular science though he might be, had any right in the company of gentlemen and ladies.

A little puzzled us to the best course to take, she took Silvia aside, and said,

“I am called away for half an hour. Will you forgive me, and look after this girl?”

Silvia said, “Yes.”

Louisa ran off as fast as she could to the Seminary, and was lucky enough to find Monsieur Simonet at home.

“You have found a clue to a new conspiracy, Miss Louisa,” said Simonet. “That *inébranlable* Nugent is determined to run away with you. He is the prime mover in this matter, depend on it. Now, I have an idea. This little wretch ought not to be at Silchester: bring her up here, and I’ll have her taken good care of.”

“Will it not be very inconvenient?”

“Not at all. In the holidays we have plenty of rooms vacant. Bring her here, and we’ll keep her out of mischief.”

Louisa went back rapidly to the Rectory, and

found Silvia and the Guernseaise still on the lawn. She suggested a walk, giving at the same time a suggestive pinch to Silvia's arm. They strolled up the town till they reached the Seminary.

"Shall we go in to see Madame Simonet?" inquires Louisa.

"O yes," says Silvia: "it will be charming."

And it was charming. Madame received them with the delightful courtesy which pertains to school masters and mistresses when a pupil arrives. What may happen to that pupil afterwards let us not too curiously inquire. An ancestor of mine, in his boyhood, writ this rhyme:

"Old Daddy Palmer, of Topsham School,
Whips us about and calls us *Fool!*
When we go home he calls us *Dear!*
Wishing us all a Happy New Year."

By-and-by Monsieur Simonet entered the room, and looked gravely at Lily le Lacheur.

"I find," he said to her, "that you have confessed to Miss Saint Osyth that you are not what you pretend to be. I am sorry that a

young girl like you should be so weak and wicked as to introduce yourself into a gentleman's house under false pretence. You will remain here for the present, while we decide what shall be done with the person who calls himself your brother. Meanwhile, think over the instructions you have received from this man whom you call Walter, and tell me to-morrow all that you can remember on the subject."

The Le Lacheur—Monsieur Simonet having rung the bell—was led away in charge of a housemaid.

"You have done a very clever thing, Miss Louisa," said Simonet, laughing. "This is another of that inveterate rascal's abominable tricks. He is a regular Don Giovanni; runs away with all the little female fools he meets; is utterly foiled when he encounters a lady."

"He deserves severe punishment for his wickedness," said Louisa.

"Ay, and he'll get it, I fancy, one of these days. Twice he has run away with you, Miss

Saint Osyth : depend on it, this balloon descent is in some way a third attempt. He is in the neighbourhood now, be assured."

"I am not afraid of him," said Louisa.

"O, but I am," said Silvia. "It is quite dreadful to think of such a wicked wretch—a kind of wehr-wolf—trying to do one horrid harm. I am sure I shall not sleep while he is about here."

"Sleep calmly, Mademoiselle," said Simonet. "Bisclaveret shall not come near you. And now, ladies, I will walk with you to Silchester. I should like a few words with the Squire."

They walked to Silchester: the Squire was in the book-room. Simonet went to him thither, and discoursed on what had occurred.

"Well," quoth the Squire, "I should not have imagined that young mechanician a scoundrel, but of course your evidence is conclusive. What shall I do?"

"Invite me to dinner this evening."

"Consider yourself invited," said the Squire.

CHAPTER II.

DINNER AT SILCHESTER.

“Noblesse oblige : génie aussi.”

THE party who dined at Silchester that night were the Squire and his wife and son and daughter, and Monsieur Simonet and the aëronaut. This last seemed puzzled by the absence of his pseudo-sister, but was quite satisfied when informed that she had been induced to remain at Madame Simonet's.

He was in absolute perplexity, this young gentleman. He had bound himself to Walter Nugent, but he saw clearly that he ought not to have done so. He found himself among people of a class heretofore utterly unknown to

him; was amazed to be treated as their equal, when he had sense enough to see they were of a far higher kind. He saw that he had made a mistake; he did not quite see his way to get out of his mistake.

The opportunity was however afforded him that evening—by Monsieur Simonet. He drew Achille Gilet out of his shell by various processes. Somehow, Simonet had a little omniscience about him. We have heard him boasting of his instinct, and it was no idle boast. He had detected something false in these two new arrivals by balloon. He played quite a pleasant little game with Achille Gilet, dropping curious hints which nobody else understood.

After dinner, Monsieur Simonet contrived to enter into a scientific conversation with the aëronaut. He talked of Montgolfier. He showed that he knew a great deal more (theoretically) of the aëronautic art than even Achille Gilet himself.

“The attraction of gravitation is of course

your great difficulty," said Simonet. "There is a story which I can neither verify nor falsify of an aëronaut who discovered a method whereby that attraction could be reduced to zero. As a consequence, he found that he could make a tour of the solar system. The story proceeds to say that his first attempt was a voyage to the moon, and that he has never been seen since."

"The Man in the Moon was hospitable, I suppose," said the Squire.

"Let us hope so," replied Simonet. "I have never visited the moon myself, and all one hears of it is much to its discredit. Astronomers assure us that it has no atmosphere—which to a man who likes oxygen as much as I do must be unpleasant. They also assure us that only one side of it is ever turned to the earth, and one naturally wonders what there can be on the other side. Again, though the whole surface of the moon is not greater than that of Spain, there seem no buildings upon it."

"How do you know, Monsieur Simonet?" asked Silvia.

"We have telescopes strong enough to discover a cottage," he answered. "We only find hills higher and valleys deeper than any on this planet's surface. Some imaginative astronomers fancy they can make out the skeleton of a gigantic animal at the foot of a hill of bones."

"How very amusing," said the Squire. "Can't you fancy the final Radical, *ultra* and indeed *plus ultra* Radical, having eaten up all previous politicians, and looking like Charles Fox and John Bright multiplied by a thousand? Something of that sort has evidently happened in the moon. I suppose the experiment of existence was tried there on a small scale to begin with. Imagine a Lilliputian Adam and Eve put on the stage to see how they would behave. It would take about seventy moons to make the earth. So a lunar gentleman of stalwart proportion probably weighs between two and three pounds, and is about nine or ten

inches in height. Fancy all the history of the world transacted on its satellite by small creatures of this sort!"

"What has size to do with it?" asked Simonet. "Have you read Voltaire? Don't you remember the giant of Sirius and the dwarf of Saturn? God could put into an iota of life invisible to the strongest microscope an intellect a million times greater than Shakespeare's. There is nothing sublime in a mere mass of matter. I have always a contempt for the gentleman who is proud of being six feet high. Advertise: you will find somebody who is seven or eight."

"I quite agree with you," said the Squire. "Still, in a world where few men are six feet high, there is some satisfaction in being six feet two."

They then went out upon the terrace, and Simonet offered the aëronaut a cigarette. They strolled up and down together for a few minutes. Suddenly Monsieur Simonet said,

“You are a remarkably able young man, Monsieur Gilet, and have the chance of a great career before you. Allow me, as having had some experience, to give you a little advice here, under the starlight, with the flavour of latakia mingled with the fragrance of roses. Science like yours is a great gift, and should be wooed with reverence. It should never be prostituted to evil ends. To have a fine faculty is a felicity given to few, and those who are so fortunate should endeavour to use it nobly. The poet who writes mere prurient trash is a man more unfortunate than one to whom no poetic power has been given. The painter who puts on the canvas themes merely designed to suit the public taste will never reach the lofty level on which Raffaele and Titian dwell. If I were an ingenious mechanician like yourself, I would refuse to construct any engine of warfare, unless it were to defend my own country against an invader.”

“It is difficult,” said Gilet, “to be quite free

from external influences. When a man is poor——”

“Poor!” interrupted Simonet. “At your age there is no poverty. At your age I lived on sixpence a day. At your age, with the glory and gladness of youth upon you, it would be an utter abomination for you to sacrifice your honour and genius for a trifling amount of gold—coined hatred. Can you not live on potatoes and salt?”

“I can live on anything,” said Gilet, “but I fear I have not quite understood the ideas which you indicate, Monsieur. You speak a language hitherto unknown to me.”

“It is a language which should be well known to all men of the higher class of intellect. You have brilliancy of invention—a tremendous power: can you not see that such a power ought to be honourably directed? Use it for the benefit of the race.”

Gilet was silent, and had given up smoking. Monsieur Simonet continued:

“I have reason to think, from what I hear, that you have allowed your remarkable genius to be misused by a person of whom I know something, and who has done infinite harm in this neighbourhood. When you are older, you will see how unwise this is. With a noble intellect should be associated noble morality. If you feel that you have not done what is right, tell me, and I will advise you.”

Hereupon Gilet told Monsieur Simonet all he knew about his rascally employer, and informed him that he expected to have from that personage notice as to what he was to do at Silchester.

“Ah,” said Simonet, “then stay here quietly and wait till the fellow arrives. If we get hold of him, we will soon stop his rascality. He is a unique scoundrel, but I think we are likely to terminate his scoundrelisms.”

Young Gilet took this opportunity of asking whether Lily le Lacheur were quite safe

Monsieur Simonet assured him that she was with Madame Simonet, and that no harm should come to her; but that he should take charge of her until it was discovered what Nugent's plans were, and that it was necessary to keep her from the companionship of other girls in consequence of her intercourse with Nugent. Gilet was much surprised at this last remark, for he had supposed that Lily was an innocent girl, and merely led to assist Walter Nugent in his scheme from a love of adventure.

He was a thoughtful young fellow; too much wrapped up in his many little scientific experiments to notice the young women in his grandmother's shop, or he might have found out that Lily was one of those born Lesbians that even this nineteenth-century civilization cannot eradicate. Perhaps it was fortunate for him that he had not found it out.

After this conversation, Simonet advised the Squire to tolerate Gilet, and to await the next

move made by Nugent. Clearly, Nugent's plans were not exhausted. The Squire was intensely amused by the plots of a young gentleman who showed such marvellous capacity for love and conspiracy.

"That's the sort of fellow," he remarked one day to Dr. Sterne, "who ought to be bottled off into three-volume novels."

CHAPTER III.

TWILIGHT, MOONLIGHT, MIDNIGHT.

“Charity begins at home—and sometimes ends there.”

AT about this time a house which for some months had stood empty, just beyond the limits of the manor of Silchester, was suddenly taken by a charming old widow lady who was the fortunate possessor of two daughters. She rather despised daughters. She would have preferred a son of robust temperament, who would drink and smoke magnificently, and who would either fight for liberty or preach heresy. Failing such a scion of the stock, Mrs. Selfe snubbed her daughters, and enjoyed herself in her own way. She corresponded with

Garibaldi and Mrs. Putney Giles. She went to London specially to hear the Reverend and irreverent Mr. Noysey preach. She enjoyed life after a fashion. It was a life of twilight—a negative life. She mooned about her gardens; took her drives; wrote her little ridiculous letters of heresy or disloyalty, too often enclosing cheques; and lived altogether a chill life of twilight, misty and miserable.

Yet she doubtless enjoyed it, so far as enjoyment is possible to persons who crawl through a bloodless and torpid existence. Look at a tortoise, immovable for hours and even days in its favourite corner: compare its career with that of the eagle which rises with swiftness incredible into the thinnest air, and occasionally drops a tortoise on the skull of a poet. The poet Æschylus, on whom that experiment is said to have been successfully tried, had a brain that moved many times as much faster than the eagle's as the eagle's than the tortoise's. Doubtless a great many folk would

think the tortoise had much the best of it. If he could not enjoy, he also could not suffer very much. When Hermes was six hours old he invented the lyre, chancing to see a tortoise, as the Homeric hymn says *σαῦλα ποσὶν βαίνουσα*.

*"Ενθ' ἀναμηλώσας γλυφάνα πολιοῖο σιδήρου,
αἰῶν ἐξετόρησεν ὀρεσκόοιο χελώνης.*

Shelley translates :

"Then, scooping with a chisel of gray steel
He bored the life and soul out of the beast."

The tortoise would not suffer much : assuredly his suffering bears no measurable proportion to the delight of the infant god who turns a reptile into immortal music at noon of the day whereon he is born. Let Hermes have his way.

Mrs. Selfe, as she kept a carriage and pair, was evidently within the limits of county visiting. Everybody called on her, of the minor gentry. Augustus Olde, M.P., a Whig-Radical of more theory than eloquence or

sagacity, paid reverence to that pair of horses. A carriage and pair is always a safe social investment. It makes your neighbours friendly and your tradespeople civil.

The Squire and his family did not call on Mrs. Selfe, for the simple reason that this custom was one which the Squire abominated. He argued thus: If people of whom I know nothing come into my neighbourhood, and desire my acquaintance, let them obtain an introduction to me. The matter is not difficult. A good many people know me. If I were to call on any new comer within a dozen miles, I might, even in this innocent vicinage, encounter objectionable people. A respectable-looking country gentleman takes a farm-house, and you suddenly find he is a trainer of race-horses, and that the female he lives with is not particularly married to him. There is nothing more absurd than plunging into acquaintance with people you don't know.

Thus prelected the Squire: but an accident

brought Silvester into connexion with the Selfe family. A friend wrote to him saying that he had heard they were in the neighbourhood, and were so situate that a little excitement would do them good. Silvester told his father, who said,

“Go and see them. Mention your friend Rolleston’s name. If the mother is not pleased to see you, the girls will be.”

“Label yourself *engaged*,” said Silvia.

Silvester threatened playfully to box her ears. Although his sister was a year older than himself, he always maintained that, after his father, ne was the head of the family. Silvia, who tried to laugh at him at first, found that he meant it, and gave up the idea of resistance.

He went off on his errand, and was on the whole amused. The old lady was singularly intelligent, but had dosed herself with the prevalent follies of the time, and believed in “Mary Ann,” and thought Garibaldi a hero, and the Reverend Noysey an apostle. She was chilly

and negative, rather; her very enthusiasms were cold; she iced you, slightly, by the tone of her conversation.

The young ladies were of quite another sort. Silvester, an artist in poetic nicknames, called the mother Twilight, the elder daughter Moonlight, and the younger Midnight. The old lady assuredly gave you the idea of a November twilight, with ample allowance of mist about, and a chilly rheumatic sensation running through every bone in your body. The elder girl had just the hair you would attribute to the goddess Artemis, and an exquisite grace of movement, such as seems to pertain to the crescent moon when the clouds pass it on a radiant night. This was Moonlight. Midnight had hair that sometimes looked black, though it was only a dark brown; and she had a pleasant simplicity and purity of character which gave her an infinite charm.

Silvester came back, giving a graphic account of the eccentric old lady and her two

daughters. He liked all three, though he had wit enough to see there was a sort of unsatisfactory want of sympathy between them. Mother, rather tired of the world, going in for abstract unitarianisms and republicanisms : daughters, just beginning the world, absolutely content with Church and State, but by no means content with hopeless maidenhood. Lovely girls, they had been consigned by their mother's caprice to a dull existence. She, you see, had made up her mind upon everything ; was a kind of positivist in petticoats ; looked with contempt on the follies and frivolities of her daughters. Admit her right ; the fact remains that ladies do not usually reach this height of wisdom till they have long passed the pretty pleasant time of folly—the time when the merry glance of an audacious boy has such a joyous fascination. In those young days you make a toy of time.

An incident in connexion with Silvester's

visit to Mrs. Selfe's is worth noting here. Said Miss Aurelia, the elder sister,

"Mamma does such odd things. She has allowed a queer old gipsy woman to live in a shed or outhouse that we have—because she says the gipsies are descendants of the ten lost tribes of Israel."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Silvester. "What a pity the other two tribes weren't lost! We should have been much better off without them. Fancy! no bill discounters, no 'o'clo'! to wake you in the morning, no paste sold as diamonds, no sordid rascalities."

Midnight, who had been christened Kitty, quite agreed with him.

"That old gipsy woman," she went on to say, "is such a dreadful gossip. She comes up to the house on all manner of pretences, and Mamma tolerates her. I am quite sure she is a wicked old witch, but if Mamma takes a prejudice she adheres to it, and I think she would consider it quite impossible that either a

gipsy or a unitarian could do anything wrong."

"The gipsies and unitarians should cross breeds; you might get something fresh from the two together. The æsthetic of the gipsies would improve the unitarians, and the logic of the unitarians might possibly improve the gipsies."

"That," said Moonlight, "I think doubtful."

"Well, of course it is doubtful," quoth Silvester; "still I don't think one class could do otherwise than good to the other. The gipsy's idea of happiness is to encamp in green lanes in the summer time, and live on hedgehogs and squirrels and stray poultry, and be altogether free. The unitarian's idea of happiness is to sit in a stuffy chapel and to hear an energetic gentleman logically prove that the gospels are incredible. For my part, I think the unitarian has much more to learn of the gipsy than the gipsy of the unitarian."

“Then you are neither the one nor the other, I suppose?” quoth Midnight.

“No,” answered Silvester. “I believe—in lovely girls.”

“And of course the lovelier the better,” remarked Miss Aurelia.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OLD WOMAN.

“ . . . Vestrum delictum est asinus.”

ONE day, all the High Street of Silchester village being singularly free from traffic, an old woman in a red cloak, enthroned in a donkey-cart, caused quite a sensation as she drove slowly through. Perhaps everybody may not at once realize the intense dullness of a small country town when it is not market-day. The Londoner, who knows his Cornhill and Piccadilly, and is accustomed to the motley crowds that keep those streets alive, finds himself in a country town perfectly alone at high noon. There are shops, and

there are shopkeepers; but the shopkeepers are taking a prolonged siesta behind their counters. Nobody is awake. How people live in these somnolent places is a problem that never has been solved. They are as silent as the city in the Arabian tale where everybody was turned to stone. Yet in these country towns and villages people make large fortunes, and transform themselves from shopkeepers into country gentlemen. How is it done?

The gipsy whose progress up Silchester street in her donkey-cart has been narrated was the Bohemian old lady whom Moonlight and Midnight talked about to Silvester. She had sought shelter in Mrs. Selfe's outhouses, and had obtained it. She had kept quiet for a day or two; then she went out into the town to tell fortunes and hear gossip. In both she was successful. She picked up a great many shillings from servant girls and young labourers, repaying them with predictions of marvellous

good fortune. The girls were to marry gentlemen with plenty of money; the boys were to make money themselves in mysterious ways. Never were shillings better expended, if only the prophecies were reliable.

Among the ladies who patronized this knowing old gipsy was Mrs. Dyer. What the gipsy told the Mayor's lady is not important—perhaps that her husband would be knighted, and that she would be Lady Dyer. This is the natural ambition of the Mayoress. What the gipsy learnt from Mrs. Dyer had evidently much interest for the old woman. She evinced much interest in two stories which the confectioner's wife—pardon, the Mayoress of Silchester—told her. One was of a mysterious adventure in an old tower at Silchester Leigh—and how a young lady had been taken from there to Madame Simonet's Seminary. Another was of a balloon unexpectedly descending in Squire Silchester's grounds, it was said with a girl in it disguised as a boy.

"We are all in a flutter about it," said the Mayoress, "and we don't know how to get at the truth. I tell my husband that, as chief magistrate of the town, he ought to cause inquiry to be made; but he's afraid of the Squire. A set of cowards! They're all afraid of the Squire."

"I think I could find out the truth," said the red-shawled old gipsy; "indeed I know I could if I saw the eyes or held the hand of any of them. I suppose I couldn't get in to tell fortunes at the school?"

"Don't you try. That old Simonet—his wife keeps the school—can tell fortunes better than you, I think. He'd see right through you at once."

"Would he? Not unless he's a Romany chal. You are sure the girl they found at the tower is there?"

"Quite sure. But if you want to tell fortunes, why not go up to Silchester? The Squire likes gipsies, I'm told. You'll

see the balloon people, and tell their fortunes, mayhap."

"I will go," quoth the old woman.

"Come back and tell me all about it," said Mrs. Dyer, eagerly. "There's something very odd about that balloon business."

The gipsy promised to return. She went straight toward Silchester, and reached the lodge gate through which tradesmen's carts usually passed; so she drove her donkey through unquestioned, and arrived at the house, and soon had a numerous *clientèle* among the servants.

Silvester happened to pass round that way, as the fortune-telling was going on. He threw a coin to the old woman, who at once exclaimed, "Long life to the young Squire. He'll learn to read and write, and be sorry for it ever after."

Silvester was amused hereat; when he returned to the terrace in front, he found his sister and Louisa there, with Gilet the *aéronaut* in attendance.

“There’s an amazing old woman telling fortunes in the servants’ court,” he said. “Will you try her veracity? She’s an extraordinary old object, and says I shall be sorry for learning to read and write. How could she know that I had only recently taken to those arts?”

“From a servant, Monsieur,” said Gilet. “People of that sort pick up information in irregular ways. They lurk at back doors and learn small secrets. Doubtless if the old woman came round here she would know something that you would not expect her to know.”

“Well,” said Silchester, “suppose we try.”

He went in search of her, and brought her round to the front. She was garrulous.

“Ah, young ladies, you don’t know all the wisdom of us Egyptians. I’ve a wash for your skin that will keep you as beautiful as Venus till you are a hundred years old. I’ve a medicine that makes old people young. I can turn your hair any colour you like in a day. I can

give you a drink that any man who tastes will love you madly ever after. I can give you a salve that will cure any wound, and a powder that if you drink will kill your enemy. I have a magic glass that will show you what any one is doing when you look into it, wherever they may be."

"She talks nonsense very fast," remarked Louisa to Silvester.

"Ah, the pretty lady does not believe the poor Romany chi: but she will marry the young Squire if nobody runs away with her before the time. She was born under Mars: it will be a hard fight before she is happy. O, I can see, I can see. She will marry the man she loves or the man she hates—I don't yet see which."

"There's method in the madness of this strolling sorceress," said Silvester. "She has learnt something of your adventures, Louisa, and is applying her knowledge rather cleverly. Let us hear what she has to say to Monsieur

Gilet. Come, old lady,"—to the old woman—
"what is this gentleman's fortune?"

"Not to be drowned, for he does not travel by sea; and not to be crushed, for he does not travel by land. But if he goes to Mount St. Nicholas Bay to-morrow at midnight, he will meet some one upon the sands who will tell him how to build a balloon that can be managed as easily as a steam-ship."

With this oracular deliverance, the old woman turned away and mounted her donkey cart.

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Louisa gave Silvester a look which meant "Come with me," and he followed her down a pleasant avenue of limes whose heavy boughs lay far across the grass.

"What do you think of that gipsy, Silvester?" asks Miss Louisa, looking lovely and arch in the linden shadow, sunlight-sprinkled.

"Talkative old party," says Silvester, who

was specially occupied in looking at Louisa, and cared very little about gipsies.

“You dull boy!” she said. “Speculate. That gipsy’s a problem. Solve her.”

“I’d rather solve you, but you’re insoluble. What are you driving at? Why shouldn’t the old gipsy make a fool of herself?”

“O dear me!” exclaimed Louisa, “what very slow people you men are! I quite agree with the ladies who colonized Amazonia. Can’t you see through a disguise? Can’t you see who that old gipsy is?”

Silvester shook his head, looking profoundly puzzled.

“O you dear stupid boy, how well I shall manage you when I am Mrs. Silchester! You really are delightful. Did you hear the gipsy tell the young Frenchman to be at St. Nicholas Bay to-morrow at midnight?”

“Yes, I just caught the words. It was only her nonsense, of course.”

“My dear Silvester, it is my firm belief that

if you and I should ever marry we shall be obliged to reverse the marriage service. You will have to obey. You are such a dear dreamy boy that you want somebody to keep you in order."

Silvester laughed.

"Wait, child," he said. "Perhaps you will find, one of these days, that I know how to command. Don't you know the old Elizabethan poet's rhyme—

"She often for her fancy fights ;
She likes to have her way :
Yet nothing so her heart delights
As having to obey.

He flips her with his summer glove
When the hot noon is still—
Says, ' You may have your way, my love,
But I must have my will.' "

"A pretty epigrammatic bit of chaff," said Louisa, "but in my opinion not Elizabethan. More in the style of Walter Landor. But now, what's to be done at midnight to-morrow? "

"You and I will be asleep—apart," says Silvester.

"Tiresome boy! Will you consider? Of course you know who this gipsy is."

"How in the world should I know who gipsies are? I have never studied the subject, which they say is very difficult."

"O dear, dear, dear, that I should be thinking of marrying such a dull young gentleman! That gipsy, Silvester, is Walter Nugent."

"*What!*"

"Yes, darling—I knew him at once. He has another scheme in his head. Evidently he thinks Gilet will obey his orders."

"Well," quoth Silvester, after a few minutes' reflection, "you are cleverer than I, Louisa. I see now in what respects women beat men. I should not have found that scoundrel out, but now you mention it I can see you are right. Well, we will have some fun. I will go as well as Gilet."

"And I will go with you," said Louisa.

"Why?" asked her lover.

"How many reasons do you want? Because I like. Because I like to be with you. Because midnight is a romantic hour. Because if you fight and kill each other, I can marry the survivor."

"You chatterbox!" said Silvester. "Since you have been in love you have been getting quite foolish."

"Who told you I was in love, sir? And who is the fortunate mortal?"

"One can see you're in love by the swing of your petticoats. But now be serious for fifteen or twenty seconds. You really wish to go down to the Bay to-morrow at midnight?"

"I do."

"How will you manage?"

"Quite easily. Come in and have some supper with us. Then I'll tell my uncle I'm going to see you home. He has complete confidence in my capacity for taking care of myself."

“My darling Louisa,” said Silvester, “he is right. You are the most masculine woman I know in the sense of power; the most feminine woman I know in the sense of gentleness. Yours is a very remarkable character.”

“I suppose,” she said, “I am a conceited little fool, but I have once or twice thought that very thing. Good or bad, mine’s a rather curious character. I never feared anything. I always thought that if a girl loved a man she should tell him so. I should have told you so, Silvester, only you were too quick for me.”

Silvester’s reply may be left to imagination.

CHAPTER V.

THE SUMMONS.

“Whoever guides a swift balloon
May rise too high, may fall too soon.”

A CHILLE GILET understood his summons, but was quite unaware that any one else understood it. Having made an honourable promise to Monsieur Simonet, he went down to the Seminary as fast as he possibly could, and told him what had happened. The Frenchman was quietly smoking in the garden, and looking after his fruit trees, when Achille was announced. Excellent well looked the wall-fruit, and Simonet was in high good humour.

Gilet told what he had to tell.

“Ha!” said Simonet, “this is amusing: now we have the fellow. To-morrow at mid-night you say. I will be there.”

“Must I be there?” asked Achille.

“Assuredly. This ought to settle the fellow, and banish him altogether. We are all getting tired of him. Be there with me. I will decide whom else to take. Come here in good time to-morrow evening. You can get in at Silchester at any hour of the night.”

Gilet being dismissed, Simonet walked up to the Manor House to have a talk with Musical Willie. The humorous balladist was always glad to see him. 'Twixt France and Scotland has been alliance for many a year—long even before a witch-queen of Scotland married a pale dauphin of France. The two countries differ widely: there is a great gulf between John Knox and Pascal, between William of Deloraine and the Chevalier Bayard, between James VI. and Henry of

Navarre, between Robert Burns and Voltaire. Scotland is a realm of self-government; France, of self-destruction. Yet there is a point of contact between them. Both are countries destined to be conquered, so there is a minor note in their music, a wail in their ballads. Only under the Buonapartes, an alien piratic Corsican race, had France any real victorious power. When *geist* and *élan* came to a single combat, *geist* got the best of it. England (or, rather, the English race) has neither the one nor the other. Our folk don't want to fight—but we can. We simply say: "By all means—invade; attack; burn down London if you can, and destroy your best customer. You may take us at a disadvantage, and do us some harm. We like to live quietly, and do our work and believe in God. You come and worry us. Very well. We'll serve you as we served the first Buonaparte. When you can build a city like London, when you can produce a captain like Wellington, an admiral

like Nelson, a poet like Shakespeare, we may perhaps be afraid of you. Till that, don't talk of invading England. Scold if you like: the courteous diplomatic scold is great fun."

Writing in the moist May of 1872, one may perhaps venture on a digression as to diplomacy with America. This *Alabama* business! Does it not seem absurd to keep such a question open, just because the Presidential election depends on it. Could not England say, "Well, Mr. President, you want a few millions. We have a few millions lying about. Name your sum; we won't be particular as to shillings and pence." Then send a cheque, and the matter is finished. Make it payable to order.

We English usually come well to the front in the long run, but not until many blunders have been made. The reason of this is our intense individualism, which produces a hatred of centralization, and is the chief source of our supremacy. It has been well said by a French essayist that every Englishman is an island.

We are however beginning to discover that Government, the sworn servant of the nation, can do for us many things much better than we ourselves can do them. What is a Cabinet? There is a major domo and steward—Mr. Gladstone just at present: not a bad manager, though his temper is imperfect, and he is perhaps too fond of making improvements. Then we have a bursar, or purser, or cashier—the Chancellor of the Exchequer; a gentleman to write letters to our friends—the Foreign Secretary; a gentleman to look after our home farm—the Home Secretary; a gentleman to manage our outlying demesnes—the Colonial Secretary. These are all servants—*Ministers*—from *minus*, less. Who is MAGISTER? The English people; who, whatsoever the form of government, will always rule themselves.

We want more servants than we have. We sadly want a fellow to look after drains and cesspools; who shall be called a Minister of Public Health. Municipal stupidity produces

inveterate nastiness: there is no one to rigidly enforce the axiom—*The rain to the river, the sewage to the soil.* Rivers are polluted and land is sterilized because corporations are incapable. A strong hand is needed to force health upon us.

Another man-servant of the nation that would be very useful may be styled a Minister of Public Charity. The amount of money unintelligently given every year in charity is amazing. Hospitals and orphan schools and the like are very good things, but they all ought to be under control. Only 'too often their committees are formed of men who supply the establishment with things eatable, drinkable, wearable. Was there ever a female orphan school without a bonnet-maker on its board of directors? Then if new buildings are erected, and a Prince is induced to lay the foundation-stone, the accounts show that more has been spent on the affair than it brings in—even though ladies are permitted to flatter their

foolish vanity by presenting five-guinea purses personally. And at schools of this kind, where the buildings are superb and the grounds exquisite, the poor little orphans are cabined, cribbed, confined, ill taught, ill fed. : Those lovely acres of lawn and flower-plot would be put to better use if they grew cabbage and asparagus and lettuce for the poor fatherless imps who scarce ever taste such easy luxuries. But no ; lawn and flower garden are an advertisement, and draw subscriptions.

A Minister of Public Charity would soon cure all this, if only he had brain. Interfere not with existing charities : let people subscribe as before to their pet beneficences. Only, let a Cabinet Minister be prepared to receive money from any one who has money to spare, for charitable purposes—the giver stating, if he wishes, the way in which he desires the money to be applied. The certainty of accurate appliance would greatly increase the number of gifts. In time all the great charities of

England would come under Government control, and their value would be increased twenty-fold. Charity Commissioners are well enough in their way; but we want a Minister of Public Charity, responsible to Parliament. We want a man who can tell the House of Commons what he is doing.

Simonet found Musical Willie at home, but slightly melancholy. When the current of life hath a sinister bend, the humorist is more melancholy than most men. Had the Bishop of Moray been there to sing

DVNC : HVNC : OBTRVNC : AVIT : MACBETHVS,

it may be doubted whether Musical Willie, with all his melodious spontaneity, would have found a rhyme for it. He was tired. He hated the thought that a connexion of his could be an absolute scoundrel. He worried himself unutterably and unnecessarily. This is the semi-poetic temperament. The highest poet—a Homer or Chaucer or Shakespeare—is wholly

untroubled by the tricks of time. He is above them. He sits on the daïs of the deities. The man who is only just a poet—a poet more by ambition than achievement—cannot take life in this fashion. His notions are of quite another kind. He sings musically enough, and echoes the melodies that lie close around him, but he cannot hear the music of the spheres.

“It has often occurred to me,” said Simonet, as they walked up and down the quaint old terrace of the Manor House, “that we do not use Greek types frequently enough in our literature. Now the oldest and most beautiful romance in the world is the *Odyssey*, but our romancers never tell a story in that same straightforward fashion. There is a popular poet of the present time who writes what he calls *idyls*: has he read Theocritus? And where is there anybody who dare take Demos by the collar and scold him as wittily and scourge him as sharply as Aristophanes did?”

“We are all afraid of Demos now,” said Willie. “He is the true hero of the song,

‘Wha dare meddle with me?’

There have been one or two periods in the world’s history when, in the absence of men with the governing mind, the populace for a time have had their way, to their own and the world’s detriment. I rather fear a period of this kind may be coming just now.

“What do you call the governing mind?” asked Simonet.

“A mind that is intelligent, resolute, unscrupulous. The intelligence need not be much above the average, but the will should be as strong as a vice, and the conscience as pliant as a lady’s glove. Those are the people who govern best. I don’t envy them their faculty any more than I envy the policeman his truncheon, or the postman his horn. But they are uncommonly useful; and if I were a millionaire, I should found an academy for

training Cæsars and Cromwells and Napoleons."

"Millionaires have done things more foolish," said Simonet. "But I must be moving homeward. Is your gigantic follower, Donald, about? He sometimes condescends to find me some fish—not without your permission, I hope?"

"Faith," said Willie, laughing, "it is I who ask permission of Donald. The rascal does what he likes, and thinks me fortunate in being under his protection. He's leal and true, but he's a Highlander—and your thorough Highlander has an intense contempt for anybody born out of his own demesnes. Donald is very fond of me, for one or two reasons which I need not now mention; but he pities me for having been born in Edinburgh, just as a citizen of Athens in the time of Pericles would pity a Laconian or Bœotian. However, you were asking where the kilted colossus might be found. He went into Sil-

chester for me an hour ago. You will probably meet him if he is not here before you return."

Donald had not returned when Monsieur Simonet left the Manor House: he met him on the pleasant path which led through meadow and woodland to Silchester. The Highlander had just vaulted a stile, and was striding along like a grouse-shooter, when he suddenly saw the Frenchman, quiet, amused, smoking his eternal cigarette.

"Ha, Donald," said Simonet, "the play is not at an end yet. Your friend Mr. Nugent is in petticoats this time. He is what you call an auld wife in your northern country."

Donald said nothing, but looked surprised.

"It is so. You heard of the balloon. He did not come in the balloon, but he sent it here. He is to meet some one who came in the balloon at midnight to-morrow in St. Nicholas Bay. Shall you and I be there, Donald? It might be amusing."

“Hech! it might. I’ll be there, your honour. I’m weary of this mad-brained young fool who is making my dear master miserable. If I catch him to-morrow night, he won’t fly about in balloons or tame tigers any more. Let me once get a good grip of him, and there’ll be an end of all that nonsense.”

“He has been a terrible nuisance to Mr. Nairn,” said Simonet. “I wish we could shut him up in a lunatic asylum.”

“A madhouse, ye mean?” said Donald. “Ah, but he’s not mad. I wish he was. He’s pure wicked.”

Simonet was decidedly of opinion that Donald drew a subtle distinction.

CHAPTER VI.

SUPPER AT THE RECTORY.

“Sup where you love : you have the upper
Hand of the Fates in such a supper.”

SILVESTER SILCHESTER accidentally observed the Reverend Arundel Saint Osyth on his lawn in the summer evenglome. The Rector was watching his flowers. The air was full of the grateful smell which flowers yield when watered. The clerical race are in these times much abused, but they have done two great things for us—they have been our masters in gardening and in letters. Save for them, we should have neither fruits nor flowers, neither poetry nor prose. We should

be barbarians, ruminant animals. The Church preserved civilization, and made the modern forms of life possible. Had there been no monks and nuns, there would now be a scarcity of gentlemen and ladies. The work was done blindly. In a monastery of Mount Athos you find a manuscript of a classic poet, worth its weight in diamonds, written over with some ecclesiastical stuff. No matter; we wash off our theology, and we have our poet. In this dull way much good has been done by gentlemen who had no idea they were doing it.

The modern English parson, though not always intensely brilliant—which indeed would be too much for the average parish and typical parishioner—has often a love for books and a love for flowers. The Reverend Arundel Saint Osyth had both. He liked elegant literature, and was wicked enough to enjoy Herrick and Suckling and Waller and Prior; had once or twice, in his younger days, turned a tuneful verse for ladies of his acquaintance. He could

make an epigram, the Rector. One night he and his niece had a playful discussion on the great science of Erotic ; and Louisa boldly maintained the thesis that she was not in love, never had been, never meant to be. On the breakfast-table, when mocha and pekoe breathed alien fragrance among English flowers, Louisa found this tetrastichon :

“ Louisa cannot love, she says—
The story-telling elf :
Some one she'll love, in future days ;
Just now, she loves herself.”

The Rector, watering his flowers—that summer evening, was not sorry to see Silvester. Not anxious to lose his niece, whose company was charming and whose sermonettes invaluable, he yet felt pleasure in the thought that she would pass into good hands. The Rector was an acute judge of character, and saw in Silvester Silchester an amount of latent unexercised power which even the young man

himself did not know that he possessed, since nothing had occurred to educe it.

"That boy can manage Louisa," said the Rector to himself.

Whether our clerical friend was right or not remains to be seen.

All this time Silvester has been leaning over the gate, enjoying the delicious fragrance of the Rectory garden, and admiring the Rector's perseverance in watering. Now he enters. Now there is talk about those lovely pelargoniums. Now Miss Louisa comes tripping across the lawn, a fine full figure in white muslin, and pretends—little hypocrite!—to be so astonished at seeing Silvester, and asks him to stay and have supper.

"Donald brought up such a lovely lobster this afternoon," she says, "and you are the only person who knows how to make a lobster-salad."

Silvester was celebrated for his salads. He used Devonshire cream instead of olive oil,

and produced a result which the accomplished epicure may be left to imagine.

Imagine now the Reverend Arundel Saint Osyth's parlour. Windows open. Exquisite breath of summer. Delicious flower fragrance. Multitudinous glowworms and ichneumon flies. A vast china bowl, a superb cock lobster, much crisp lettuce, abundant cream. Silvester manipulating, with Louisa to help. There was probably a bottle of Chablis, but this must not be mentioned, since criticism and teetotalism have become synonyms.

It was a pleasant evening. The Rector, who in his time had been a little harsh and stiff, had learnt much from his niece Louisa, a young lady who had an unwonted amount of knowledge both of the real world and the world of books. To-night he talked classics to Silvester, and quoted Catullus and Horace, and enjoyed his lobster and Chablis, and was altogether charming. Our little Louisa laughed inwardly at having thus completed her uncle's

education. But for her he might have been a very dull fellow indeed—dry, hard, polemic, pertinacious. He did not know it. He never will know it, to the end of time.

Supper is a barbarous meal, but where is man or woman who can refuse a lobster-salad at ten on a hot summer evening? Supper ended, the Rector, who kindly wished the young folks to have a talk together, let off his last Latin quotation, and walked upstairs. Silvester finished his light wine, and said to his lady-love,

“Shall we loiter on the lawn? It is only half-past ten. Our sensational appointment is not till twelve. How will you manage about getting in, by-and-by?”

“I have a key that unlocks one of the doors. You will come back with me. I feel quite safe with you.”

“Oh dear me,” says Silvester, “and you used to say I was a boy. Don’t you remember?”

“You are a dreadful teaze,” said Louisa.
Silvester improvised :

“She said I was only a boy :
 ‘My darling,’ said I, ‘if you
 Would like this boy for a toy,
 Your dignity he’ll destroy,
 And teach what you never knew.’

“My child, you are only a girl,
 Yet your lips have love’s soft dew :
 So pretty a girl is a pearl
 Unfit to be touched by a churl—
 Let us think of it, I and you.”

“You *do* make very nice little bits of naughty verse,” said Louisa. “I’ll just get a bonnet and a wrapper, and we’ll start on our adventure. I am not at all afraid, *with you*.”

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE BEACH AT MOUNT ST. NICHOLAS.

“Strange is the whim
At midnight to swim.”

THE antique gipsy whom Mrs. Selfe characteristically patronized, probably thinking her of the same stock as the Irreverent Mr. Noysey, picked up in Silchester village some gossip that interested her. She heard that at a certain ladies' school there was a young person who had come from the old tower at Silchester Leigh. She had a great desire to see this young person. She got to a back entrance, and succeeded in tempting the cook and a couple of housemaids to have their fortunes told. While doing this, she introduced dexterous questions, the answers

to which amazingly puzzled her. She ventured on the statement that there was somebody in the school that was not expected, and got for reply,

“Yes, she came in a balloon.”

This was a regular enigma for our plotter, who could not imagine how Lily Le Lacheur should be there, and was thinking only of Laura Brontë. She—or it may as well be written He—tried hard to get the servants to induce the mysterious young lady to come and have her fortune told; but there was small chance of violating the sanctity of the Seminary Simonet. We have seen that the only young gentleman who ever seriously attempted it paid painfully for his adventure.

Baffled at the Seminary, the gipsy picked up what gossip was obtainable at Dyer's, Michael's, Sexton's, Taylor's, Withers's. There was a good deal floating in the air, but it was strangely contradictory. Just as on a stormy March day there is such a regular battle

between N. E. W. S. that one cannot tell from which quarter the wind blows, so in usually quiet Silchester the greatest gossips could not make out what had happened. A hundred stories were afloat, no two alike. The inquisitive gipsy, getting gradually into a state of complete obfuscation, was obliged to resign the investigation—and prepare for midnight.

Midnight! No gipsy now—but the Walter Nugent whom we have seen before, clad in seafaring flannel and serge, and fiercely anxious to carry out his latest scheme. There was a moon nearly full. Nugent was on the sands a good half-hour before the time, pacing them impatiently. Nugent, a trifle maddened perchance by adventure strange beyond count, was always in a hurry to carry out his schemes. He would have been in just as great a hurry had he known who was waiting for him. Many faults had he, but not fear among them.

When you get down to Mount St. Nicholas Bay, you are beneath and between noble cliffs

of red sandstone, and there is a sweep of sand like marble, two miles in length, and below it at low water a belt of shingle and shells, and a very narrow wooden pier for trawlers and occasional pleasure-boats, running fifty or sixty yards into the sea. That is all : quite enough, for the man who loves sea, sky, cliff.

The two parties who had discovered Nugent's secret were in no league with each other. Each wanted to have the renown of conquest and exposure. Silvester came down with Louisa, resolved to take by the throat and roughly handle the fellow who had dared to play tricks with the loveliest lady he knew. Simonet had come down with Donald, sending Gilet a little ahead, to confer with the rascally intriguer. But, as on the one hand Silvester, and on the other Simonet, were acting quite independently, their meeting on the sands surprised both parties.

It must be described in detail. Nugent, it has been said, was there early, pacing the sands demoniacally, utterly regardless of

"That orb'd maiden with white fire laden
Whom mortals call the Moon."

His watch was fast and his temper hot. To him presently arrives Achille Gilet, penitent aëronaut.

"Where is Lily?" exclaimed Nugent, turning on him fiercely. "Why did you not bring *her*? I have much for her to do."

"She is ill, Monsieur," says Gilet. "Allow me to carry your commands."

"You! you are useless! A mere mechanic, who can just guide a balloon. Still, I believe you are clever enough to try and deceive me. That girl is not ill. You are in a plot against me. Plot away! Try it! I will beat you all!"

Simonet and Donald were awaiting the result of this interview from one point of the beach, quite unaware that Silvester and Louisa had come down in another direction. Both parties were lying as carefully concealed as deer-stalkers. Simonet and Donald (difficult to hide) were behind a big rock, whose shadow, as the moon lay low, looked a mile long at least. Louisa and Silvester, coming a different

way, had ensconced themselves on the dark side of a thicket of Scotch rose, and were as happy as, under the circumstances, could be expected.

Walter Nugent and Gilet faced the sands, the latter using the strongest language he could find—and he had rather an extensive vocabulary. He anathematized rather ably. The anathema is an imbecility, and the man who uses strong language has a weak brain. When I hear a man swear at a servant, my reflection is, “You won’t dine with me.”

The colloquy between Nugent and Gilet was a hard one—for Gilet at least. On him it was hard, because he must not awake any suspicion in Nugent’s mind. So a sort of fencing went on between them, which led to nothing.

Silvester, having been for some time hidden behind the Scottish rose, said to his lady-love,

“I shall go and collar that fellow.”

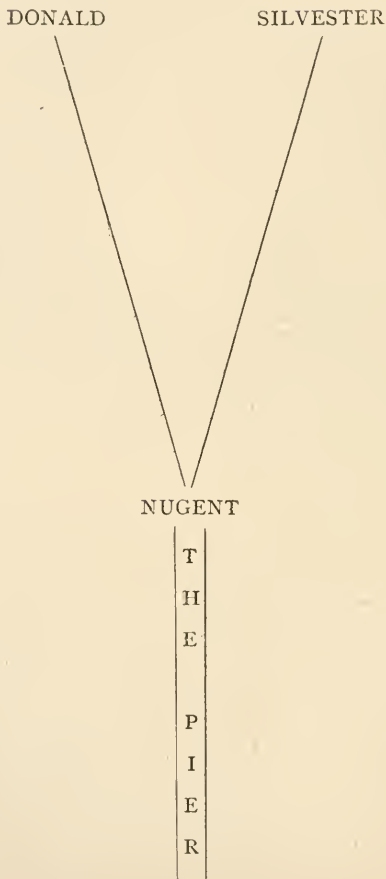
Oddly enough, Donald at the very same instant asked leave of Simonet to drop upon him. Quoth Simonet,—“Go!”

Kindly look at the Asses’ Bridge—Euclid

I. 5—and you may easily see what occurred.
Invert the diagram.

DONALD

SILVESTER



NUGENT

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H

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P

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E

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The chances are that if Donald had caught Nugent at that instant, there would have been a very rapid end of him. He might perhaps have rescued himself from a boy like Silvester, but the giant Highlander would have been tried for manslaughter. However, the scamp escaped this fate. So bright was the moonlight that the danger was instantly visible. He saw two pursuers appearing simultaneously, one on either side of him. He had no chance to escape them on the sands.

He rushed to the very end of the narrow pier, and sprang into the sea.

“He’ll be drowned!” cried Silvester.

“Nay,” shouts Donald, “he’s born to be hanged.”

He was last seen swimming like a dolphin, heaven knows whither.

CHAPTER VIII.

ANOTHER MIDNIGHT.

“Hespere, qui coelo lucet iucundior ignis?”

THE party returned quietly from their vain pursuit. There was a little harmless fun among them as to their unexpected meeting. Simonet, drily humorous, professed to deem it slightly curious that a young gentleman and a young lady should be on the sands together at at an hour so abnormal.

“Ah,” remarked Louisa, with her customary archness, “you forget, Monsieur Simonet, that I am old enough to take care of him. Every boy wants a governess.”

“Every boy who gets such a governess as

you is fortunate," said Simonet. "Pray how is the salary paid—in guineas, or——"

"Or what?"

"Or kisses. They are the exquisite coinage of youth—the floral currency of boys and girls."

"Very lucky," says Silvester, "that they can thus coin without paying a royalty to the Crown."

"They pay their royalty," replied Simonet, "to that master of us all—Posterity. Not being properly obedient to our Creator, we are ironically punished by having to obey those whom we create—or help to create. Our children are our worst tryants. I, you know, have instructed a great many young persons of both sexes, and have been amused and amazed at their capacity for tyranny and cruelty. That is the reason why naughty children should suffer corporal chastisement. That is why the boy who worries a dog or the girl who pulls a cat's tail should be made to endure physical pain and mental shame."

"Posterity be hanged!" says Silvester. "I have an ancestral epigram on that subject which perchance Miss Saint Osyth might deem improper. Any one who wants to know it must write to the author."

The party made their way up the narrow steep street of Mount St. Nicholas. They talked a little of what might possibly have happened to Walter Nugent. They decided, after some discussion, that it would be as well to inform Mr. Nairn of the adventure. So they stopped at the Manor House, and the mighty Donald ushered in Louisa, Silvester, Simonet, and Gilet.

It were merely painful to record the part of the conversation (confined to Silvester, Simonet, and Musical Willie) which related to the midnight-bathing scamp. A man like our poetic friend hates the thought of nepotic scoundrels.

"Do you think he'll drown?" he asked.

"Drown!" says Simonet. "Can you drown a shark?"

Musical Willie insisted on the whole party staying to take nocturnal refreshment.

“You will get home to breakfast,” he said.

Which they did.

They had previously eaten a remarkably good supper, whereof lobster and rabbit were chief ingredients. The wine therewith must not be named for fear of the critical gentleman who thinks it *so* wrong that Lafitte or Steinberger is mentioned when you are (of course) drinking turpentine gin in a low public-house. It is a mistake in a work of art to mention critics, just as the pulex is not named in genteel society. Still, they exist, they irritate, they turn up in the wrong place, they make the cuticle uncomfortable.

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Louisa coming home to breakfast after an excitable night out of doors, was of course a thing unimaginable. Can you imagine her? She was tired, excited, delicious. The sort of

woman whom it is my desire to describe is confoundedly undescribable. Pretty?—Perhaps. Witty?—Rather. Dreamy?—Drat it! Sweetheartish!—Yes, thank you.

‘All this is chaff. The perfect lady is the difficulty of description. Nobody, it seems manifest, has done it except Homer and Shakspeare. Nausikaä and Rosalind! It has, however, been cleverly remarked by a female critic that they were both of them too forward.

Certainly they were, according to modern opinion. Yet, before this chapter closes, it is hoped that a certain young lady will justify the forwardness of Nausikaä and Rosalind.

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For on the following midnight there were two people together in a square walled garden, whose walls were covered with magnolia, whose lovely lawn was done into geometric flower-plots, arranged with symmetric skill. You

descended into it by a flight of steps from one of the corridors; and it was famous for quaint old-fashioned flowers, and for scent of magnolia unmatched nearer than St. Germans.

Silchester had that day been a scene of excitement and speculation. The Squire, usually a quiet man, was unable to resist the torrent. Everybody came to dinner; everybody stayed to the short hours. Affairs were growing only too effervescent. Several contested elections had Silchester seen, not altogether to the discontent of the electors; but a series of contested abductions was an absolute novelty. So there was much gossip that night at Silchester, and much gossip as to the probable fate of Walter Nugent.

"He will reappear," said the Squire. "That sort of man always does reappear, as a benefit to his race."

"Where is the benefit?" asked Simonet.
"Of what use are rascals?"

"There is nothing useless in the world," said

the Squire, now fairly mounted on a favourite hobby. "Of what use are hornets, wasps, toads, slugs? There would be no chloroform but for ants, nor any ink save for the gall-fly."

"I should like to exterminate both insects," said Simonet. "And to me, chloroform and ink are almost synonymous. I think the darker narcotic the safer."

"It certainly has done more work in its time," said the Squire. "It has killed poets and critics innumerable. I object to reading and writing, but ink is a grand poison for literary vermin."

While continued this kind of conversation 'twixt the Squire and Simonet, methinks that other colloquies of different natures were elsewhere in progress. We have named the magnolia garden, but the couple in that fragrant square were not the only wandering couple. Silvester and Louisa were on the bowling-green terrace, where yew hedges as

old as Evelyn closed them comfortably in. Dear quaint old Silchester is a lovely place for loving couples: a dozen might be there, and all easily avoid each other.

MIDNIGHT ON THE BOWLING-GREEN.

SILVESTER.—We must get married soon, Louisa, or that fellow will run away with you again. I am so sorry I did not get hold of him yesterday.

LOUISA.—O, I am glad. I want him to appear in a new aspect. He is such a clever fellow that his tricks amuse me, and I am not in the least degree afraid of him.

SILVESTER.—He might play you one trick too many. He might reverse King William's motto, and say *Rapui non recepi*.

LOUISA.—You naughty boy! I wish I did not know Latin.

SILVESTER.—A wish easily fulfilled, since you have so little to forget. Your intelligent ignorance, my darling Louisa, is worth many

hundredweight of moonlight—though moonlight is not altogether a bad thing.

LOUISA.—Upon my word, I never saw such a pert nonsensical boy. I won't marry you, sir.

SILVESTER.—No child—because it is my duty to marry you—and I'll do my duty even if you kill me with kindness beforehand.

LOUISA.—O dear, what a troublesome fellow it is! Wait till we're married, sir: then you'll discover what penances I mean to inflict on you.

SILVESTER.—Do you know, I am not alarmed? Now, last night I sat up dreaming about you——

LOUISA.—And smoking?

SILVESTER.—Of course. My pipe's my wife, and you're only my sweetheart. And I made about you the doublest, treblest, quadruplest, multiplést acrostic. Will you read it? The moonlight is bright enough.

LOUISA (reads):

“Lovely Louisa Lingers Lonely :
‘Ordain One Owner, One, One Only,
Unique, Unbought, Unbrought, Unsent,
Immeasurably Impudent !’
So Says She, Sweetly Straying Soft.
Ah, Angels Always Are Aloft.”

You are a good hand at dexterous nonsense, Silvester, but can you write a play?

SILVESTER.—Yes, I will,—and make the loveliest girl in the world the heroine.

LOUISA.—Pray, who is she?

SILVESTER.—Don’t look in your glass to-night, that’s a good child. It might spoil you.

LOUISA.—Wretch !

MIDNIGHT IN THE MAGNOLIA GARDEN.

THE DOCTOR.—What a lovely moonlight, Miss Silchester ! It is unwise, you know, to be out under the full moon.

SILVIA.—O, shall we go in at once?

THE DOCTOR.—I think I can venture to assure you that you will not be injured by a short

stroll in this pleasant garden. But I thought you might like to know the moon is supposed to have strong influence on the human brain.

SILVIA.—Yes, I have heard of lunatics.

THE DOCTOR.—A simple-subtle answer. I begin more plainly than ever to see the devil's in the moon for mischief. You'll excuse me for mentioning the devil, Miss Silchester.

SILVIA.—O dear yes, Dr. Sterne. Papa won't believe in him; and Cuvier says he's a graminivorous animal; and I should very much like to meet him at an evening party.

THE DOCTOR.—You would come to no harm, since we have it on high authority that

“The Prince of Darkness is a gentleman.”

But, Miss Silvia, I did not come among these lovely magnolias to talk of the Leader of the Opposition.

SILVIA.—No? Then why in the world did you come?

THE DOCTOR.—Do you know how much older I am than you?

SILVIA.—Oh, you came to talk chronology! Well, at a guess, a thousand years five months and a fortnight.

THE DOCTOR.—I must be growing old.

SILVIA.—*Growing* old! Why I thought you had grown. I remember papa saying he had heard grandpapa say that great-grandpapa told him the register of your birth was destroyed in the Fire of London. I don't know how old that would make you, for I never could remember dates, except those they sell in boxes—and get thrown down wells into the eyes of genies' sons.

THE DOCTOR.—My dear Miss Silvia, knowing myself much older than you, I hoped against hope to ask you a question, with a faint hope of a favourable answer. You laugh at me so that I dare not ask.

The Doctor and Silvia were at this moment in a spot semi-shadowed, and the pretty

petulant girl stood between a yew-tree and the moon. She laughed, and said,

“When Doctor brings such recipe
For lady-patient, what's his fee?”

There is reason to believe the fee was soon paid.

CHAPTER IX.

MUSICAL WILLIE'S RESOLVE.

“ I leant my back unto an aik,
I thought it was a trustie tree—
But first it bowed, and syne it brake.”

IT has been observed that the music of conquered nations is usually in a minor key. It is curious that in the ballads of Scotland and Ireland, there is also a melancholy wail, as if the sorrow of conquest had come upon the minor minstrels, making them sing sadly. This same sadness is not confined to themes of war: the ladies of Scottish song are always complaining that their lords have deserted them. The truth seems to be that races not strong enough to hold their own in the world

are likewise not strong enough to carry on the ordinary affairs of life aright. The ladies are too light of love, the men too false of heart. Weakness comes out in many ways.

Willie Nairn was sorrow-stricken by the wicked weakness of his nephew. He did his best to appear serene, but found it very hard. The old melancholy refrains of his country haunted him. He thought of the royal minstrel who sang—

“ And we'll gang nae mair a-roving,
A roving in the night ;
We'll gang nae mair a-roving,
Let the moon shine e'er so bright.”

Then came upon him that calenture, that desire to see again his own country, which often comes on weary wanderers by sea and land. He murmured to himself the old song which Burns completed :

“ My heart's in the Highlands ; my heart is not here ;
My heart's in the Highlands a-chasing the deer ;
A-chasing the wild deer, and following the roe :
My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go.”

He remembered an old gray stone house on the steep side of a hill, with a small loch black in the valley, where he had passed many wild days. Though a Lowlander, his heart was in the Highlands. This quaint old place was his own property, bought long ago by his great-grandfather, a substantial baillie of Edinburgh. The old couple who lived there had many a time asked the Laird to come and see them; now he determined he would go right away into that distant corner of our island, and sulk awhile, and fish for loch-trout. So he summoned Donald. Thus ran the colloquy:

WILLIE.—Donald, I am going to Scotland.

DONALD.—Ah, master, how I long to see it again! I dream of nights of the bush aboon Traquair, and the bonny bonny gloamings that were long ago. When are we to go back to our own countree?

WILLIE.—You must not go yet, Donald, my friend. I want you to stay and see what happens here. I am selfish, I know, but it is hard

for me, all this ;—you can guess it well enough. I have not strength of mind enough to act as I ought to act in this case. Will you remain here, and see that Walter Nugent does no more harm, if you can prevent it ?

DONALD.—'Tis hard, but I'll do it—for I'd go to the death for you, William Nairn. But when this trouble is all over, don't come back from dear old Scotland without letting me be with you there.

The sole other person with whom Willie took counsel was Squire Silchester, who fully approved of his idea.

“You are right,” said the Squire ; “you ought not to be worried to death by this fellow, who evidently is in a state of mental malformation. Such men are a nuisance in the world. No fault of yours is it that you happen to be connected with him by sheer accident. No blood of yours is in his veins. You would be unwise to trouble yourself too much about eccentricities which clearly are

born of a brain partially disordered. Go to Scotland; catch trout; write to me if you send me any, or if you don't. Leave us to deal with this youngster in the event of his again emerging from ocean. I will make you acquainted with anything you really *ought* to know, but with nothing else. Forget this trouble so far as you can, and take a holiday till you are summoned back again."

Away went Musical Willie northward, saying to himself as he travelled:

"O the oak and the ash and the bonny ivy tree,
They flourish best of all in the north countree."

He reached that famous city which at one time magnetized the whole of England. He cooled himself and forgot his cares in a certain saloon where the most lion-like of men of letters was foremost figure,—a man afraid neither of mad bull nor madder Radical. He supped at Ambrose's: there was haggis, there was whisky punch, there was wild colloquy. There was the glorious chorus of reckless

genius only found when the Princes Royal of Bohemia meet. Those Princes Royal are rare. You do not meet them in Bohemia's sordid suburbs: you must go into the very heart of the Palace of Imagination—the mansion of the Great King—before you can know where real genius dwells. There you encounter the men whom one epigram or one love-lyric has made immortal; the men who are judged by quality instead of quantity.

Then, after refreshing himself by a dip in the Castalian waters he had known long ago, Willie rushed away in a hurry to his old Highland heritage. There were many temptations to remain in the Athens of the North. Willie might have encountered so many of his old friends in the purlieus which he had haunted in old time. He did not feel up to his usual capacity for enjoyment. He ran off to his old Highland haunt, greatly amazing Rob and Jean Macgregor.

They gave him the best room in the house.

They gave him the cosiest seat on the fireside settle. They saw there was something wrong with the master, and were too gentle to speir what, and tried their best to give him consolation. Willie, for his part, was only too desirous to be consoled; he went in for oblivion; he drank Lethe in form of trout-fishing and long explorations; he found himself, in course of time, absolutely enjoying existence. He almost forgot his nephew. The romance of Mount St. Nicholas seemed a strange vague undefinable dream, as devoid of reality as the marvels we see shown in the clouds of a summer sunset.

CHAPTER X.

ON SILCHESTER BOWLING-GREEN.

“Ianua patet, cor magis.”

WILLIE NAIRN has departed to his beloved North ; Walter Nugent has departed none know whither. The Squire and Monsieur Simonet hold counsel together, as to a couple of other departures which they both deem necessary.

“After his confessions,” said the Squire, “I don’t know that it would be advisable to inflict any punishment on Gilet, though he clearly was member of a conspiracy. But it would be as well to get rid of him as soon as possible ; and I suppose you and Madame Simonet would like to get rid of the young woman.”

“Assuredly,” said Simonet. “My wife is getting rather perplexed by her eccentric guests.”

“I should think so. It would have driven her wild but for the guidance of your brain. However, what I propose now is that you should send for that Guernsey girl at once, and we’ll pack her and Gilet off together. Nothing is now to be gained by keeping them here, and we know where to find them if we want them.”

Simonet agreed. They were brought together into the Squire’s room of justice, and each received an appropriate lecture, which need not here be iterated. They then were sent back to Guernsey, under Donald’s charge so far as Plymouth. When he got them safely aboard the *Sir Francis Drake*, the Highlander left them abruptly, only saying,

“If I see either of you again, you’ll be sorry for it.”

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The Squire could not tolerate such Whig-Radicalisms as croquet and lawn-billiards, but bowls he regarded as a good old Tory pastime, and he kept up the choicest of bowling-greens, to which ladies were admitted. There was a grass terrace above it, with three pavilions; one, where ladies could refresh, and cool themselves after a trial of the game; another for men; and a third for smokers—the third sex. The bowling-green at Silchester was popular on summer afternoons, when nobody had very much to do, and most people less. After the confabulation between the Squire and Simonet already recorded, the Squire said,

“Can you induce Madame Simonet to come up and loiter on the bowling-green to-morrow afternoon? The Doctor and I have a match on. He thinks he can play.”

“Oh, Papa,” said Silvia, who, with Louisa in company, had just joined him, “would not Madame Simonet bring a couple of her pupils? I should think they would enjoy the change.”

"I should indeed think they would," said Simonet. "But how should we select the girls to bring?"

"I will tell you, Monsieur Simonet," said Louisa: "Bring the nicest girl you have—and the naughtiest."

"Extremes meet, you know," said the Squire. "Suppose the nicest and the naughtiest were one and the same, as they would be if you were under Madame's despotism, Miss Louisa."

"I do call that a lovely compliment," said Louisa. "As I am not at school, though I know I ought to be, I am quite sure Monsieur Simonet can find a nice girl and a naughty girl. You will try, Monsieur, will you not?"

"I will succeed," he said, "though I am sorry you are not a candidate for the N.G. degree. I should like to be Examiner on the occasion."

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That party on the bowling-green was very pleasant. The *boulingrin*, as the French call

it, is a charming resort under many conditions. There are old-fashioned country towns where it is kept up in perfection—sometimes by a club of gentlemen or tradesmen, sometimes in connexion with a cosy tavern, where port wine is not altogether a thing of the past. In the former case, on summer evenings the wives and daughters of the subscribers sometimes assemble; then there is flirtation, more or less scientific, and much quiet enjoyable fun. It would be hard to find any game which so thoroughly combines healthful exercise, real skill, and agreeable society. Every country house ought to have its bowling-green. For bowling is a nice old-fangled picturesque diversion, even for those who can merely look on, and do not know the meaning of a bias. Honour to any town that has public bowling-greens.

Have you ever seen the bowl moving across the level lawn as if it were a living thing—like a hard-boiled egg into which has

been thrust a quill of quicksilver? Croquet is baby play in comparison with it. The only question is, whether it may not be too scientific for ladies.

On this delicious summer afternoon the Squire and the Doctor had arranged to play a single-handed game. The Squire was predestined to win, since no Scotchman can play bowls to perfection, any more than an Irishman chess, or a Welshman cricket. The game shall not be described. The green had been rolled—the terrace had been mown—the pavilions had been furnished with all things necessary for ladies, gentlemen, or smokers. The spectators of the great tournament were

Mrs. Silchester, with her knitting;

Monsieur Simonet, with cigars;

Madame Simonet, with two girls who had graduated N.G.;

Aurelia Selfe, with her sister Kitty;

Louisa Saint Osyth, with Silvester;

And—Silvia.

The young ladies produced as specimens by Madame Silmonet were Grace Greenland, N.G., and Amy Chatterton, N.G. No reader will have much difficulty in discovering the exact meaning of these diplomas in each case.

Lounging on the terrace above the bowling-green, while the Squire and the Doctor went through the game (the Doctor being early in difficulties), and while Monsieur and Madame Simonet talked to Mrs. Silchester, were no less than six young ladies whom Silvester had to entertain—hard work for so young a gentleman. Aurelia and Kitty, real artists in dress, were enshrined in turquoise-blue; Louisa, stateliest of the group, was porphyrian. Grace Greenland, a plump schoolgirl of ample curves, was in maiden white,—as also was our dainty Silvia. Amy Chatterton—

“The sort of minx
That’s pretty in pinks”—

wore a blushing frock of the proper colour. Let us record a part of the conversation.

AURELIA.—Do you know, Mr. Silchester, that wonderful old gipsy Mamma used to patronize has disappeared altogether. Mamma is quite in a way about it.

KITTY.—Yes, and we are both in hopes she has stolen some spoons.

SILVESTER.—Ah, Mrs. Selfe does not know the whole truth about it. Shall I tell you the secret?

AURELIA.—Oh do, please.

SILVESTER.—Why the old gipsy was the Rev. Mr. Noysey in disguise, and my father and the Rector have had him taken up and put in the stocks as a rogue and a vagabond.

KITTY.—Goodness! You *must* be joking.

LOUISA.—Of course he is joking, Miss Selfe. He has such a weakness for inventing stories without plots that I sometimes fear he may become a successful novelist.

SILVESTER.—Dreadful fate! Fancy going down the stream of time in company with Fielding and Scott!

SILVIA.—Really, if you do, I shall be quite proud of my brother.

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There was a movement at this point towards the ladies' pavilion on the part of some of the group—Aurelia, Louisa, Silvia, Silvester. Silvester was athirst; talking to girls always made him want bitter beer, he told his sister. Malt and hops, in his opinion, constituted the only tonic that would cure sentimental nonsense. That his opinion on this subject was known appeared from the fact that the Hebe in attendance brought him a tankard on his very entrance, and then asked what the ladies would like.

“We might manage a little Mosel-cup,” said Silvia.

“A dignitary of the University and the Church—poet and logician—made the best verses on drinking that I know,” quoth Silvester :

“If all be true that I do think,
Seven reasons are there why we drink :
Good wine—a friend—or being dry—
Or lest we should be by-and-by—
Or idleness beneath the sky—
Or a sweet girl’s inviting eye :
Or any other reason why.”

The young ladies, Louisa not except, were not literate enough to detect the falsification of Dean Aldrich’s epigram. So they drank their cup, and Silvester his ale, and Aurelia felt slightly merrier than if she had been dutifully keeping silent on a Sunday afternoon while her mamma studied the profound platitudes of the *Inquirer*.

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Meanwhile Kitty and the two school-girls, who were not athirst,—though Amy Chatterton would have accepted some ebrious fluid had she dared, just for the sake of excitement,—were talking together. Amy, however, knew full well that Madame Simonet, though en-

gaged in conversation with Mrs. Silchester, knew by some clairvoyant instinct what her two pupils were doing. Amy was the chatterer of the trio, of course.

“O dear me,” she cried, “how lovely this is, Miss Selfe, in comparison with our dreary dull drab schoolroom! Why do people go to school? I am sure I shall forget everything I have learnt the very day I leave. Don’t you think it’s a great shame?”

GRACE.—Don’t you think this child is a great nuisance, Miss Selfe? I assure you nothing keeps her from talking all day and all night, except appropriate corporal chastisement. And then she is always chattering about her ideal lover, and whether he should be dark or fair, whether his eyes should flash love or beam love. I can’t think where she learns such nonsense. Besides, when she is not enthusiastic, like a monkey, she is miserable because her liver is out of order.

KITTY.—Goodness! the idea of a chit of

seventeen knowing that she has a liver! Why I am ten years older, and have never discovered mine. She should be put on a vicious donkey and made ride a dozen miles.

AMY.—You *are* cruel. I do declare you are as bad as Grace, who threatens to smother me.

KITTY.—No wonder, if you chatter all night long.

GRACE.—Oh, and she is rheumatic, Miss Selfe—and I think she sets up for having the gout.

AMY.—Oh no! That *is* an invention.

KITTY.—I am glad to hear it. *You*—such a shrimp—with a liver and rheumatism. You have no right to the diseases of your four great-grandmothers. If children go on in this way, there will soon be no young people except the old people.

AMY.—What *do* you mean?

KITTY.—Why look at the Squire, or at Monsieur Simonet. Either of them is younger

than you. They have no livers. By the way, have you any brothers?

AMY.—No.

KITTY.—Ah, that in a measure accounts for your being such a silly infant. Brothers would have made you climb trees, fag at cricket, wade in the river for their broken fishing-tackle, get them forbidden beer after everybody was in bed. I'll tell you what it is, Miss Greenland, you should treat Amy as if you were her big brother.

GRACE.—I will—even to the beer.

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It is not “always afternoon”—most Shakespearian of Mr. Tennyson's phrases—anywhere save in Lotosland. The Squire's game reached its end, the Doctor having been ignominiously beaten.

“It is another Flodden,” he said, as he came up the slopes of the terrace.

“Ah,” said the Squire, whose hand was on

the Doctor's shoulder, "I suppose you remember that Flodden helped to unite two kingdoms."

"I am so glad you beat him, Papa," quoth Silvia, whose laughing eyes greeted them as they reached the terrace level.

"Thanks, Silvia—it is much to say. Come, Sterne, she shall pour us out some claret. My throat is adust."

CHAPTER XI.

E.C.

“Romani pueri longis rationibus assem
Discunt in partes centum diducere.”

A WIT of these days once remarked that the greatest nuisance of modern conversation was E.C.—Eternal City. He did not mean Rome, though from the Venusian’s remark above cited, clear enough it is that Rome had its city men—trained from their boyhood even as ours. Horace proceeds :

“At haec animos aerugo et cura peculi
Quum semel imbuerit, speramus carmina fingi
Posse linendo cedro et levi servando cupresso ?”

Certainly not : and what wants E.C. of poetry

or wit? Use your cedar for pencils to note down Erie-bargains, and set your cypresses over the tombs of extinct companies. In the City—that City proper which contains the Bank, the Exchange, the Mansion House, Capel Court, the Ship and Turtle, and a few other great institutions touched with *aerugo*—there was just now quiet intimation of a new railway speculation likely to make the fortunes of several promoters and engineers and contractors, and to bring to Covent Garden the famous asparagus of Silchester, to Billingsgate the glorious lobsters of Mount St. Nicholas, to Smithfield the toothsome mutton fed on the fragrant terse grass of Silchester Downs. It was the Silchester Junction Railway, in fact. It was kept very quiet, at first, because the promoters thought it would be an unusually good thing; because, likewise, it was known that the Squire, a resolute old Tory, hated the kettle on wheels as Nelson hated a Frenchman, or Porson a false quantity.

As yet, therefore, though a few men had the matter in their hands, no publicity was given to the scheme, for it was rightly thought that the Squire would strongly oppose; would indeed do his best to prevent the requisite preliminary survey from being made. When it has got its Act of Parliament, a railway company is it practically omnipotent; but in its embryo stage has no more right to trespass than anybody else.

The main difficulty of the Silchester Railway promoters was to find some one who could conduct the necessary survey with secrecy and success. It was almost indispensable that he should know something both of the country and the people. Engineers grow not at Silchester, though big asparagus does; and Augustus Burley, Esquire, who had designated himself as Chairman of the infant line, was driven to his wit's end.

What is the most improbable is the likeliest thing to happen. Burley knew the omniscient Rokes, and confided to him his difficulty.

“Odd!” says Rokes; “I had business with just the man to-day. He knows Silchester well.”

“But is he an engineer?”

“An amateur, I should say, but quite up to what you want. I must not tell what he came about, but we had occasion to talk on questions which showed he had plenty of engineering knowledge.”

“I certainly should like to see him,” said Burley.

“Easily done. He is staying at the Tavistock, and his name is Ralph Carnac. I expect he is at home now, for he said he was going to use up a ream of the hotel paper in writing letters.”

“But would he be willing to undertake the affair, or has he other engagements?”

“My impression is he has plenty of money—but I also think he would not object to more. Of his pluck and science you will be a better judge than I. Mind, I have only seen him once.”

Burley got up to go.

"Let me know how you decide," said Rokes.
"You know I am curious in trifling matters."

Burley promised: then, driving straight to the Tavistock, found Carnac writing fiercely in that writing-room so full of lavish luxury which most bachelors have known. The introduction was soon effected. They went to a private room. Burley explained.

Says Carnac, rapidly, "There are two questions: Can I do what you want? and Can you pay me what I want? You want fifty miles surveyed, much of it through enemies' grounds. We must do it at night, by stealth, with strong help. I know the country. Look here."

He roughly mapped down on a sheet of note-paper the High Street and market-place of Silchester.

"There: show that to any one who knows the place, and they will recognize it in a moment."

"I can see you understand the business. Mr. Carnac: now as to terms."

"I shall want a surveying clerk who knows his work and can punch a keeper's head—and about a dozen navvies, chiefly Irish, under a good Scotch ganger. These people you may pay as you like: but I advise you to pay them well, or they may be bribed by the enemy."

"Your ideas are admirable," said the dignified Burley, who had never before seen a man come so promptly to the point. "But as to your own personal terms?"

"With such magnificent prospects as your prospectus will announce, of course you can afford to be liberal to your pioneer."

"Liberal," said Burley, "but not lavish."

"Well, you will be glad to hear that I don't want shares in the Company: they are too valuable to be thrown away on poor engineers. I want my expenses of every kind paid during the time I make the survey."

"That is fair," said Burley.

"In addition, I require a fee of a thousand guineas, one-half to be paid in advance."

"Impossible!" gasped Burley.

"Quite easy," retorted Carnac, "and really rather less than the enterprise deserves. Why, it is impossible to say what dangers I may encounter, or how long the business may take. I mean to have that fee, and I mean to have the first cheque before you leave the Tavistock."

"You threaten!" says Burley, starting up. He was physically a coward, though vast in bulk.

"Pooh, pooh! Don't be alarmed. Only I thought of going down to Silchester to-morrow, and if I offered my service to the Squire he wouldn't grudge a few guineas—then, where's your railway?"

Burley pondered. This man's audacity fascinated and frightened him. He saw that he was the very man for the work, but he

dreaded what his colleagues would say about terms. He was too long for Carnac's patience.

"I'll make up your mind for you," he exclaimed. "You have your cheque-book: write me a cheque. To-morrow draw up your agreements and find me a clerk and some navvies. The next day I will be at Silchester, and you shall have reports and plans by every post."

Burley was "convinced against his will." The cheque was given, the agreements signed, the subordinates found—and Carnac started with his followers for Silchester.

Rokes, hearing the particulars from Burley, silently laughed—and wrote a letter.

To whom?

CHAPTER XII.

MONSIEUR SIMONET'S CORRESPONDENTS.

"Birds of a feather
Flock together."

MONSIEUR SIMONET and Mr. Eldred Rokes were "birds of a feather" in their ways; they both were students of character, and liked to see it in its most eccentric forms; both students also of that irregularity in the progress of the world which we call incident, but which is merely a designed break in the ordinary series of affairs. A great mathematician maintains that he could construct a machine that would extract square-roots for a century, and on the first minute of

the next century—or at any other time you liked to fix—would extract a cube-root, and never do the same thing again. In exactly the same way a race will be governed by a set of flat monotonous monarchs, and then a Cromwell or a Robespierre or a Buonaparte will crumple up everything. Now, if you notice the course of the most commonplace life, a similar thing occurs. At intervals there is an event entirely unexpected, and apparently unconnected with all previous events—although this of course is mere appearance, since there is perfect connexion between all the links of the mighty sagene of destined chains which we call the world. The final cause is at least as important as the primal cause: Adam may have been created chiefly for the sake of Shakespeare.

Of the science of character and incident Simonet and Rokes had long been fellow-students in quite different fields of observation. They corresponded in learned fashion.

They were the first two members of an erudite institute which might perhaps be styled the Demetric Society—if one cared to imitate the Græco-Latin hybrids chosen as titles by the London associations which mingle fashion and fun and flirtation with philosophy at their *conversazioni*. Those eventide gatherings, where Odysseus appears in a dress coat to tell—alas, not in hexameters!—the story of all that happened between Troy and Ithaca—where the microscope does battle with the stereoscope, according as ladies prefer exaggerated leg of flea or distorted figure of statue—where the coffee has more grounds than the science, and the atmosphere less æther than the sherry—where everybody has a pet theory which everybody else tears savagely to tatters,—do not seem of much use save as promoting amusement. The Simonet-*plus*-Rokes Society has not yet reached this point.

Monsieur Simonet received two letters of some consequence on the day following

Mr. Carnac's appointment. Both shall be given.

“LINCOLN'S INN.

“Thanks, my dear old brother in science, for the charming letters wherein you have described the romances that occur in so quiet and remote a place as Silchester. You and I know well that accidents of topical character are often more momentous than those of mundane character. A man may be born in a village who shall metamorphose a continent.

“And another point is that the accidents of the world have positive and negative poles often a long way asunder. Your graphic narration of the curious events at Silchester and Mount St. Nicholas has been a pleasant study for me ; and I am glad to be able to add a corollary which may be both of interest and of service to your friends. A person recommended by a client of mine, and calling himself Ralph Carnac, came to ask me a series of questions about Silchester. He assured me that his sole object was to open communications with a young lady there resident, whom he loved very much, but who was environed by obstinate relations and friends. He felt sure she loved him ; but he wanted an opportunity of access to her, and he thought I might know something of the people, and be able to advise him.

“I told him such cases did not usually come to my chambers, and made a reference to Sir Pandarus of Troy which he clearly could not understand—apparently imagin-

ing I meant the Solicitor-General. You may suppose that I got much more out of him than he out of me. His statement was that he had been trying æronautic experiments, being much given to engineering novelties; that he had descended into your neighbourhood in a balloon; that there by accident he had made acquaintance with a lovely girl, and so on *ad infinitum*. This showed what I suspected from the first—that he was your *bestia nigra*. He told me much about Silchester which I previously knew from our correspondence, and showed an acquaintance with the place not entirely consistent with the brief visit of an æronaut.

“Thinking I might some way foil the fellow, I gave him an appointment for two days later. Meanwhile, by one of those amazing coincidences which nobody devoid of life-knowledge believes, there reached my chamber a man called Burley, director of companies by vocation. He is getting up a company to railwayize you quiet folk at Silchester. Anticipating opposition, he wanted a skilful and dauntless surveyor who knew the ground, and in sheer despair came to me. I was so amused at the coincidence that I resolved to bring him and your æronaut together; so kept him talking while I sent a hasty message to the latter, who was at the Tavistock Hotel, giving him a hint that this was a short way to Silchester. I knew from the man’s look that he was shrewd enough to take the hint.

“The consequence is that he is coming down your way at once, with a troop of navvies, to survey Silchester Manor by stealth at midnight. His farther projects judge yourself. I suppose you can protect the pretty girls of Silchester. I

deemed it well that this fellow should run his head into a net—and I know you are *anceps* skilful enough to get it.

“R.”

“P.S. He made a capital engagement with the Company, and paid me a fee of fifty guineas.”

Simonet laughed much in his quiet way over this letter, and lit a cigarette before a second perusal.

“Well,” he thought, “if this young rascal escapes me again, I shall believe in the omnipotence of crime. But let me see, what other letters are there?”

He usually opened Rokes's first, being more interested in their scientific studies of character and circumstance than in the commonplace absurdities of the morning post—

“Summons to bridal, banquet, burial, ball,
Tradesman's polite reminders of his small
Account due Christmas last.”

He turned over several others with some disdain, especially contemptuous of blue envelopes. Presently he came to one in thin paper, with French stamps, and a black seal.

“*Tonnerre!*” he whispered to himself.
“Has it come at last?”

Thus ran the laconic epistle:—

“CHATEAU DE LA ROCHE SIMONET,
“HAUTE LOIRE.

“Monseigneur.

“Monsieur le Marquis votre oncle a daigné de mourir le Vendredi dernier.

“Nous attendons avec ardeur énorme vos ordres absolus, et plus ardemment encore l'arrivée de notre Maître illustre . . . ”

The “*agréz,*” followed by a score at least of “*très-humbles serviteurs.*”

Simonet lay back in his chair, and laughed more heartily than even before. The heir to a famous French family, he had quarrelled in his mere boyhood with his uncle, because he was utterly priest-ridden. He had abjured Roman Catholicism, and proclaimed himself a Protestant. Let us not too curiously inquire into the character of his Protestantism. He came to England, found occupation, married (as we have seen) twice, told neither of his wives his

position in France. Even the Squire, with whom he had literate relations—even Rokes, with whom he had scientific relations—had not a notion that this erudite humorous investigative gentleman would probably live to be Monsieur le Marquis de la Roche Simonet. Years before, the uncle had found out that his nephew was right; for Madame la Marquise, much younger than her spouse, had caused a sacerdotal scandal which resulted in her retiring to a convent, while a portly *abbé* went out as a missionary; but Simonet, having settled down in a corner of England which he liked, among people who enjoyed his society, with occupations which suited him, did not respond to the old Marquis's suggestion that he should come and live with him, and look after the estates.

“*Pas si bête*,” used Simonet to say to himself when repeated invitations arrived. “I have been my own master too long. I won't have my little wife nursing that old ogre, and being pestered by priests and other old women. No,

no,—England for me. When I am Marquis, I shall have to consider.”

This day he did consider, very seriously—all through Madame's morning school smoking deliberative cigarettes. When the giggle of liberated girlhood smote his ear, he thought, “Well, the Squire must see one of these letters. I will show him both.”

And to Madame, he said,

“I shall want no luncheon to-day, *ma chérie*. I am going up to Silchester.”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE EXODUS OF AURELIA AND KITTY.

“ My child, we were two children,
Small, merry by childhood’s law ;
We used to crawl to the hen-house
And hide ourselves in the straw.

* * *

“ The neighbour’s old cat often
Came to pay us a visit ;
We made her a bow and curtsey
Each with a compliment in it.

“ After her health we asked,
Our care and regard to evince—
We have made the very same speeches
To many an old cat since.”

OH, yes, Heinrich Heine was right ; the old cats get the bows and curtseys and compliments. Dear me, I have known so many

old cats. The worst are certainly the yellow ones.

The old lady who believed in the Irreverent Mr. Noysey did not believe in her own daughters, though two nicer girls it would be hard to find in a long summer's day in England—the country of nice girls.

However, after Silvester's introduction and visit, of course an acquaintance occurred between the Squire's family and the young ladies. Sensible girls, and devoid of prejudice, they thoroughly enjoyed the new society into which they were thrown.

Their mother did not.

She, cordially admiring an Italian adventurer, an heretical colonial bishop, an idiotic preacher of adulterated Arianism, had completely severed herself from her daughters. They were girls who, if their father had lived, might possibly have been even better than they were—though there was a practical difficulty about it. When Mrs. Selfe discovered that they

were pretty intimate with the Silchesters, she became pallidly furious.

“ Those Silchesters ! ”

This, observe, is a mental ejaculation. What else she ejaculated let us not conjecture, only hoping it was consonant with good strong orthodox Unitarianism. Let us hope it consoned. By the way, that last word hints the idea that we do not use our complex vernacular English as we ought. Professors of the noblest language in the world, we do not use it as Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Coleridge, used it. Having most gloriously expressive powers of utterance, our journalists and novelists prefer the meagre commonplace which you get from a maid-servant or an auctioneer.

The old lady was on the whole a study ; not a pleasant study, though she had her good points. She was slightly froggy. She liked her garden, and believed in Gilbert White of Selborne : but somehow or other her interest

in flowers did not make her feel pleasantly towards her daughters — pretty flowers of humanity though they were. One day, after a quarrel with her eldest daughter, Miss Aurelia went out for a stroll with the Silchester youngsters; Silvester, having learnt to write, and even to write verse, wrote thus :

“Returning, we beheld approach
An ancient lady in a coach ;
[Few carriages down here are nicer,
Her temper’s spiced, her coachman Spicer.]
Says fair Aurelia from afar,
‘ O goodness gracious, there’s Mamma !’
And so it was. She scowled, and then
She looked—‘ Those Silchesters again !’”

Things from this period became terrible for the girls. They had passed through several adventures previously. One day the house was visited by a married gentleman of the highest respectability who (and his gallant father also) had shown old Mrs. Selfe and her daughters much civility at the Crescent City of Hot Water. She would not receive him, and of course the girls were mortified immensely.

The old lady sulked in her bedroom ; would not see the visitor ; threw all the responsibility on her daughters. Poor Kitty, telling the story to Silvia, said, “ The man asked me if I was not pleased to see him. I said, ‘ O yes, delighted ! ’ and wished all the time he was at Jericho.”

But from the intimacy with the Squire’s family arose a quarrel not to be condoned.

Mrs. Self positively forbade her daughters ever again to visit “ *those Silchesters.*”

If they disobeyed, they were to leave the house, and never again return. As in such event the old lady would, under their father’s will, have to make them an ample annual allowance, they waited awhile to see if she really meant it. They had visions of a nice little house together in Warwickshire—where they had learnt to ride across country—and of keeping one hunter between them—and of entertaining a few pleasant friends.

Kitty Selfe was quite enthusiastic on the subject, when their rebellion was talked over.

"How many servants will you keep?" asked Silvester.

"O, we shall want a man for the stable and small garden, and a woman for indoors."

"How about cooking?" says he.

"I can do that," replied Kitty. "I can make beeftea and toffy already."

Silvester looked grave.

"I should like to come and dine with you," he said, "but, please, let me have something besides beeftea and toffy. If you will insert between them a salmon with cucumber, a saddle of mutton, and a few birds, I may perhaps manage."

"I shall be able to cook all those things before you come to dine," she replied. "We shall have the pleasantest little place in the world. We mean to be somewhere near Warwick, because we know all the people in that neighbourhood, and shall get a mount now and then. Do you know that country?"

“No,” said Silvester, “not in the real sense of knowing a country. I have passed a month in Leamington, at the Clarendon Hotel. I have seen a meet in front of the Regent. I have lunched on cold game and home-brewed beer at Oldham’s. I have looked at Bright’s jewellery and Hewitt’s pictures. I have heard both Craig and Smith preach. I have drunken the floral ale of Shakespeare’s Stratford, and had a flirtation in an old staircase of Kenilworth.”

“Why,” replied Miss Kitty, “you seem to know all about it.”

“Not *all*. Did anybody ever know ALL about anything? But you know Kenilworth Castle, of course. A few years ago I had an amusing adventure there. Those winding staircases in Kenilworth Castle are queer nooks for a casual encounter. I was meditating in one of them—thinking of the multitudinous feet which had worn their stone steps concave—of the numberless eyes, of lady

and knight and page, that had gazed through that narrow window on the pleasant green fields beyond—when there suddenly descended upon me a remarkably pretty maiden, with chesnut curls under her brown hat, and a humid blue eye, and a great deal more that was exquisite. The charming apparition startled me; and I have no doubt it was reciprocal, for she vanished like snow.

So I made some verses about her, to console myself. This was the sort of thing :

Sudden and swift she came ;
Not more sudden and swift
 The snow's white drift.
I wondered what was her name
As she rosily smiled . . .
 A startled child,
Easily I could see
She was nothing at all to me.

Merry and bright young thing,
Lovely as lily white,
 Lively as bright !
I wondered who had the ring
To put on her finger fair,
 And kiss it there . . .
Wondered, but still could see
It was nothing at all to me.

"I am afraid you are a general lover and profuse poetaster," said Kitty Selfe.

"I love beauty in any form," he replied, "but perhaps the prettiest form of all is a pretty girl like yourself. Do you remember that gem of a Catholic chapel a little way out of Kenilworth, with a snug dwelling for the priest close by? The said priest acted as my cicerone one evening: I don't know whether I said anything too liberal, but I fancy he began to think he might pervert me. His interest in me ceased abruptly when, in reply to a question of his, I told him I was married, which of course was a dreadful story. There was a profuse show of flowers in pots—arums, genistas, cinerarias—arranged before the altar. To mar the effect of this there was the most insufferable odour, arising I found from the tapers being allowed to expire in their sockets. This smell—and the very small amount of light admitted into a chapel so diminutive—made it too like a vault to be agreeable. But

I like the way the Roman Catholics have of making the graves of children together in a cluster. There is a pathos about those little graves, covered with spring flowers. Will you believe it? I made some verse on that topic too."

"I can believe anything of you in that particular way," said Aurelia. "However, you may recite them if you like."

"After boring your ears, you'll expect me to give you some earrings. They shall be exact likenesses of myself for one ear, and the Lady of Kenilworth in the other."

"Well, let us have the verse, without further prelude," said Kitty. "Why should a poet keep you waiting, any more than a dentist?"

Silvester proceeded:

A child is nothing but a flower,
And if it dies,
Having been with you one short hour . . .
When in the shadow of the tower
Your darling lies.
Place roses there, and maybells fair,
And maidenhair.

It has gone back to God who made
 All blossoms sweet ;
 Afar with Him, and unafraid,
 It dances through the sun and shade
 With happy feet.
 Those flowers that you so sadly strew
 In Heaven renew.

“Upon my word, Mr. Silchester,” says Kitty,
 “I don’t know when you are the greatest bore
 —in your comic mood or your pathetic. Don’t
 remember any more verse, for goodness’ sake.”

“I am so pleased with your criticism,” says
 Silvester. “Do you know how I’ll revenge
 myself?”

“No, indeed. How?”

“When you and your sister have settled
 down in this quaint like place of yours in
 Warwickshire, definitely rebelling against your
 dear mamma—little Radicals that you are!—
 I shall come and see you—and ride that
 solitary hunter of yours.”

“Oh, will you? Then we’ll buy an animal
 warranted to shy at water and break its knees
 over timber.”

“The worst threats you can make will not prevent my coming to see you at Warwick.”

“But will it be proper?”

“How if I bring my wife?” says Silvester.

CHAPTER XIV.

FRIENDS IN COUNCIL.

“Far on the dim horizon’s line
Thy golden spires, fair Orleans, shine ;
With glories laden, as with years,
Thy giant Minster’s form appears ;
While still by Loiret’s filial stream
Saint Mesmin’s humbler lilies gleam,
And pious Clovis shines above
Broad lands once given for Church’s love.
Versez moi vite et bien a boire :
Here’s to thy health, thou lovely Loire !”

THE Squire was on Olympus. He had got deep into an old folio, and had forgotten the idea of luncheon. Although a man most amiable, he liked a little uninterrupted study in the morning now and then ; and as it was possible to sport the oak on Olympus—a

necessary condition of true Olympian existence—he commonly got what he wanted. But Monsieur Simonet (shall we call him the Marquis?) had arranged with the Squire a special mode of communication. The window of Olympus looked out on a square walled rose-garden, with abundance of magnolia and wistaria and honeysuckle hiding the walls; here no gardener's foot ever trod after eight in the morning. The Squire gave Simonet a key to the postern gate; and he could come round quietly and enter by the window, which opened wide to the ground in front of Squire Silchester's favourite writing-table. This he did on the present occasion.

“Ha, Simonet, a treat!” said the Squire. “We have not had a quiet hour for some time. I have been reading Juvenal, and have almost arrived at the conclusion that his *Satires* contain a prophecy wellnigh fulfilled of the ultimate degeneracy of all the Latin races. Rome contained at that time the very essence of all the

wickedness and weakness which have spoilt France, Spain, Italy.”

“Just as in Adam was the genesis of all the world’s naughtinesses,” said Simonet, laughing.

“O, I know your old theory, and I admire your insular scorn ;—it is a fine unpalatable tonic, like your east wind, your bitter beer, your port that you call wine. Compare that muddy stuff with the Burgundy that dances and sparkles in the glass—a sunset in the glass and a sunrise in the brain. Be fair, Squire : how might it have been if only the Rhine instead of the Manche had flowed between you and Europe ? ”

“We should have annexed Europe, and it would have doubled our income-tax.”

“Ah, very good ; but I won’t pursue the argument, for I have two pieces of news to communicate.”

“Important, by your look. We shall have no time for lunch, evidently.”

The Squire produced from a cupboard a basket of Prague biscuits and a bottle of

Tokay, and, having installed his guest in an arm-chair, said,

“Now, let us pluck out the heart of your mysteries—between books and pictures on one side and roses and turf on the other.”

“You must come over and see me in France,” said Simonet, watching the Squire with the faintest of humorous smiles. “My ancestors, deeming their library their most valuable possession, built it on arches in the deepest part of the river Loire, which runs right under the house.”

The Squire marked the twinkle of humour in Simonet's eye, the twitch about his lips.

“The slang word *hoax*,” he gravely said, “is supposed to be derived from the *hocus-pocus* of the old conjurers, which was an illiterate corruption of the sacramental *hoc est corpus*.”

“On this occasion, my dear friend,” quoth Simonet, with as much gravity as the Squire, “there is no hoax. I almost wish there were. I half regret to say that I am now the owner of

an immense estate in France, by my uncle's death, and that I fear it is my duty to go and look after it. Here is the letter of announcement, received this morning. Please admire the superb style."

The Squire read it.

"But how is it you never let us know you held this position, my dear Simonet? Why did you remain here so quietly?"

"Because I liked it. Because I found freedom and pleasant friends. I quarrelled with my relations on reasons partly ecclesiastic, partly political. I resolved to be independent. I found a niche that suited me, and seem to have grown into it; so that, if I have to go to my own place, it will be with the feeling of Theseus after that wrench Hercules gave him."

"I admire your secrecy. Your wife knows, of course?"

"No one knows except yourself, nor has known since I left France; and I shall tell no

one save you until I decide what course to take."

"Why, that you will decide at once. No man has a right to shirk his duties. So we say in England: if you said it oftener in France, you would have fewer revolutions. Come, Simonet, look at it sensibly. I shall grieve to lose you, but go you must—*noblesse oblige*. I'll come and see your library some day."

"It is a fact about the library," said the Marquis. "The Château is on both sides the Loire. The library is built on arches—a long narrow room with windows up and down stream: as you read, you hear the restless river roaring underneath. There is a grand collection of rare books and rarer manuscripts—old memoirs of remarkable people."

"Ah," said the Squire, "you cannot resist that library. You will go; you will edit your family manuscripts; you will grow your own wine, and you will catch your own salmon; you will see to your tenantry; you will make

Madame la Marquise Anglaise the most popular woman in France. Won't she be surprised when you tell her?"

"I must wait a day or two first," said Simonet, "and for one reason above others. I have another letter to show you. To understand it, you must know that I am much accustomed to investigate odd developments of human eccentricity, just for scientific purposes. An old acquaintance of mine, Rokes of Lincoln's Inn, has the same tendency; but in him it has become a business, for people found out he was the best secret-keeper in London, and, not being able to keep their own, secretly brought them to his chambers to be kept. We correspond a good deal, and I gave him particulars of Nugent's mad pranks. This letter will show the result."

"Confound it," exclaimed the Squire, after profoundly pausing; "why, this is almost worse than your running off to your Marquisate, Simonet. A railway here! Not if I have any

influence. Smoke, steam, dirt, theft ! It shan't be, by God and St. George ! ”

When the Squire, not a profane man, used that grand old English oath, he was in earnest and no mistake.

“ And this professional abductor of virgins leading a gang of burglarious navvies ! I never heard such a rascally conspiracy. By the way, it's rather lucky,” continued the Squire, cooling down, “ that Miss Louisa comes to-day to stay with us. Her uncle wants change, and is going for a month ; and I thought she would be nice company for Silvia.”

“ Not to mention Silvester,” said the Marquis de la Roche Simonet. “ You must take your son into counsel, and the gigantic Donald, and your keepers. These fellows will carry bludgeons when they are out surveying, but they daren't carry guns. However, Nugent's idea is to seize Miss Saint Osyth, who ought to be safe here. It would be a grand thing if you could induce her to keep close, and make

the Rectory servants think she was gone with her uncle."

"Admirable thought!" exclaimed the Squire. "Come with me to the stables. I'll have a trap out and drive to the Rectory at once."

In about ten minutes the impetuous Squire was there, and it took not long to explain to the Rector and his niece the state of affairs.

"How shall we manage?" asked the Rector.

"Easily," said Simonet. "You were going to Exeter by coach. Alter your mind. The Squire will lend you his carriage and horses, as you have resolved to take Miss Louisa also. She will pack for travel what she will want at Silchester. Start at dusk. Let all your servants see you are off. At the Birchanger turn pull up, and somebody—Mr. Silvester, let us say—can bring this very mail phaeton and take your niece to Silchester by the lane that comes up at the back of the house. I'll be there to get her in quietly."

“Faith, you contrive capitally, Simonet,” said the Squire. “And my old coachman, Bob Waithman, is the best fellow in Devon to drive and to keep secrets. He won’t know a word about what becomes of Miss Louisa. ‘*Deaf and dumb!*’ says I, ‘Bob;’ and deaf and dumb he is.”

“Admirable man!” quoth the Marquis de la Roche Simonet.

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So there was rather an eventful evening. At dusk Bob Waithman drove the Rector and his niece away towards Exeter. A mailphaeton with very bright lamps waited at Birchanger Lane, and there was a rapid transfer of a lady and luggage, and the Reverend Arundel Saint Osyth pursued his lonely way to Exeter town. The legend is that the young gentleman who placed the lady and the luggage in the phaeton kissed one of the twain. Off they drove, anyway; pulled up at

the rose-garden postern of Silchester, where Simonet took possession of lady and luggage, while Silvester drove round to the stables. Louisa, refected on Olympus with its mildest nectar and ambrosia, was conveyed up a turret stair to a quaint suite of rooms used of old by some eremitic Silchester, where she found Silvia, who had put the rooms in order without house-maiden's aid. Nobody save the Squire and his wife and son and daughter—and the suggestive Marquis—knew where the pretty prisoner was.

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Louisa disposed of, the question was as to what should be done about these railway marauders. The Squire in the course of the afternoon had seen his head keeper, Mark Wray.

“We’re more than a match for a score of them,” said Mark; “and Donald, who’s been out with me since his master went away, is as

good as any two I ever saw. Only them navvies don't fight fair. That noble gentleman, Mr. Grantley Berkeley, said when he met a poacher in his woods he punched his head. The worst of it is, they thieves of poachers haven't pluck for that game; they'll knife you, or shoot at you in the dark, or set fire to your rick."

"You're a philosopher, Mark," said the Squire, "and an observer of human nature. You and your fellows and Donald keep watch. There are some rockets: if you find a party in the woods, let off one, and blow a horn till you get help. I shall be up all night myself,—I generally am,—and I will have all the staunch fellows in the village ready to help."

"Thanks, your honour," said Mark, departing; "and *Silchester for ever!*"

This was a kind of whispered hurrah.

"We'll beat those scoundrels, Simonet," said the Squire, "and catch their ring-leader."

The remark was made as they turned into Olympus.

“I wonder,” said Simonet, “whether we ought not to go up and see whether Miss Louisa is comfortable.”

“Of course,” quoth the Squire, gallantly; and they trudged up the geometric stone staircase.

She was comfortable. A fire burnt; for though it was full summer the rooms had been long unused. Louisa was in an easy-chair on one side of that fire; Silvia similarly situate on the other. With his back to that fire stood Silvester!

“Ha, ha!” exclaimed the Marquis.

“Ho, ho!” replied the Squire. “Louisa, I shall put you under lock and key.”

“I’ll keep the key,” says Silvester.

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Oddly enough, as the Squire and his children (among whom Louisa may be

counted) were gossiping this evening, Simonet's secret of the Marquisate leaked out. It is to be feared the Squire was the sinner. He had never kept a secret of his own: how should he any other man's? However, no harm was done—since of course everybody vowed never to say a word: and everybody was intensely delighted.

"I suppose I must tell my wife now," said Simonet.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Silvia. "Fancy having been a Marchioness for several days and not knowing it!"

"Yes," returned Louisa, "and fancy having to teach little girls like you to spell when one is a Marchioness. Oh, I am ashamed of you, Monsieur le Marquis!"

"Never mind, old fellow," said the Squire, as they retreated, "these babies must have their fun. But mind, Louisa, you are not to leave these rooms without my knowing it."

"I obey, Papa," she whispered.

CHAPTER XV.

BISCLAVERET.

“ Bisclaveret ad nun en Bretan,
Garwall l’apelent li Norman.
Jadis le poët-hum oïr,
E souvent suleit avenir,
Humes plusurs Garwall devindrent
E es boscages meisun tindrent.”

MARIE DE FRANCE.

AT a place on the Exeter road near the High Moor, just beyond the limits of the Manor of Silchester, stands a lonely old wayside inn with the quaint sign of *Tom All Alone*. How it came thereby nobody knows; still less can anybody—not even the county police—guess by what means it is kept open. True, it is the landlord’s freehold, as are about

a dozen acres of barren moor around it; but the man has no visible means of living, as he does, in a style of rough comfort. Tom All Alone is a straggling collection of buildings, some one storey high, some two storeys, built of unhewn granite. In wilder days it had been the favourite storehouse of plunder by smugglers from Mount St. Nicholas, poachers on Silchester Manor, sheepstealers, highwaymen who haunted the moor. It was vaguely thought that even now some of these arts might still be practised in a milder form to the landlord's advantage; but no proof was ever obtainable against him, and he remained there, a nuisance to the neighbourhood.

When Walter Nugent was at Mount St. Nicholas, he had heard of the inn, and had made its landlord's acquaintance. The man's name was Gridley: he was short, stout, bloated, surly, repulsive. Nobody lived with him except his niece Harriet—who also was short and stout and surly, which surliness would surprise no

one who knew the life she had to pass. Gridley was a wild unmanageable brute, but Nugent somehow contrived to tame him a little; and it had been one of his fancies to go up to Tom All Alone and smoke, and drink brandy and cider—half-and-half—in the company of this fellow. He loved anything revolting, despicable, satanic. He was a Baudelaire acting instead of only imagining abominations. He might have exclaimed with that hideous poetaster—

“Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel ;
Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup ; le ciel
Se ferme lentement comme un grande alcôve,
Et l’homme impatient se change en bête fauve.”

The legend of Bisclaveret is realized in men of the Nugent class. Night makes wolves of them—or worse.

When he had finished arrangements with Burley, our new railway surveyor thought at once of Tom All Alone. Secure in his cheque

for five hundred, which he quickly cashed, he sent a note to the portly promoter, saying—

“When my clerk and navvies are ready, let them come on to Exeter. Choose as many Irish as you can. Write to me there at the Post-office, and I will meet them. Send surveying instruments.

“RALPH CARNAC.”

“A cool fellow and an impudent!” thought Burley, “but all the likelier to do our work.”

So he obeyed the order of his surveyor, who meanwhile had taken train to Exeter. Thence he walked, by aid of map and pocket-compass, cross-country to Tom All Alone. He reached that isolated hostelry late in the summer dusk, and found Gridley grimly smoking and drinking on a granite bench outside its wide entrance—an old-fashioned folding gateway. Two drovers sat by him, similarly occupied, while a large flock of sheep, happy to have rest on their travels, were nibbling the short fragrant grass, unconscious that they were destined within a few days to appear as mutton in Exeter

market. As Nugent walked up, Gridley did not at first recognize him; when he did, he was sulkily cordial.

“Landlord,” said he, “I’ve walked from Exeter, and am hungry. What’s to eat?”

“A rump steak and some green peas,” said Gridley.

They had passed into the courtyard.

“I don’t know where you got the steak,” said the surveyor, laughing, “but I can guess where the peas come from. Let’s have them as soon as we can, and meanwhile some liquor.”

They entered the kitchen, a building by itself, with a large open fire burning. Gridley shouted for Harriet. She came, and seemed less surly than her wont when she saw who was the customer, and buckled to her work with unusual alacrity. Gridley walked off for something to drink—a jar of brandy and another of old cider. Nugent, as tired as it is possible for a demoniac to be, lay back in the settle, lazily watching the squat Harriet at her

gridiron, and the squat landlord mixing his beverage.

He ate his meal on the kitchen table, with much enjoyment, Harriet waiting and Gridley smoking. When he also had reached the smoking stage, he said,

“Landlord, I want to sleep here.”

“All right. There are beds enough. Harriet, go and air one.”

She went.

“Beds enough, you say. Could you take in twenty people, Gridley?”

“Fifty, if they’ll sleep two in a bed. What are you up to, Squire?”

“Up to something I can’t tell you just yet, though you’ll know fast enough. I want to bring about twenty people, labouring men you know, to live here for some weeks. I’ll pay you well. They will sleep in the day and work in the night. In the day they will have to keep quiet, so you must find some place for them to smoke and

drink where your general customers can't see them."

"Good pay, you say?"

"First-rate. Ten pounds down if you'll promise to do it all right and keep the secret."

"I'll do it," said Gridley, and received the handsel.

Presently entered Harriet, to announce that the room was ready.

"I'll go up," said Nugent. "I'm rather tired. Make your preparations to-morrow, old fellow, for I don't know how soon we shall want to take possession."

Nugent, who had never slept in the house before, was surprised to find himself in a comfortable bedroom on the ground floor, with a cheerful fire burning.

"I lighted a fire," said Harriet, "because I thought you might be chilly, and the room is a little damp, for it isn't often slept in."

"Well, I shall sleep in it pretty often, now. Are the sheets aired, Harry?"

"Dry as a bone," she said. "Can I get you anything more?"

"Yes, one glass of something hot. Mix a little cider—about a pint, with some brandy and any spice you've got. It will want a lot of sugar."

"Honey's better," she said.

When Harriet returned with this compound, Nugent was still in his chair by the fire. He had been ruminating as to what might have occurred at Silchester since he left that town. Louisa might have married; might have gone off on a visit; might have done a thousand things which would render his enterprise a fool's errand. It struck him that Harriet might reconnoitre.

"Harry," he said, "I want you to find out something at Silchester for me. You'll be going in to-morrow, I suppose."

"Sure," she said. "It's market day."

"You know the parson's niece there, Miss Saint Osyth?"

“I should think I did. She’s as proud as a peony. And yet we heard a story of her running away with somebody, and having to be brought back again.”

“Well, it will be easy for you to find out what I want to know—which is, whether she is at the Rectory now.”

“What *can* you want with her?”

“Never mind. Perhaps I want to run away with her. Come, find out what I say, and I’ll give you a sovereign.”

“I’ll find out,” she said.

Nugent slept the serene sleep of the wicked. When morning came, Harriet brought in his breakfast, and he lay in bed and smoked fiercely. Like Baudelaire’s *loup-garou*, he was impatient for night, to drink a draught of mischief. The girl was gone to market: the grim landlord brought in the two stone jars heretofore mentioned. Nugent ate nothing all day.

When Harriet returned, she came at once to his room.

"Well?" he said.

"The parson is gone away for his health, and the lady's gone with him."

"Where? For how long?"

"Nobody knew. They went to Exeter in Squire Silchester's carriage. One of the Rectory servants told me she saw them start."

Nugent swore, and threw her her sovereign—the Sovereign of too many of us.

"Any dinner for me?" he asked, savagely.

"A beautiful salmon and a leg of Highmoor mutton. What time would you like it?"

"Late. It's now six. I'll have it at ten o'clock. I'm going out for the night."

He coiled himself up and recommenced smoking, angry with the thought that perhaps he was about to encounter another failure. It was too much, after the disappointments already undergone. He was mad with impatience. He longed for midnight. He wanted some excitement.

Suddenly a mad thought struck him. He sprang out of bed and paced his room.

“Ha! there’s that other girl—that pretty little Silvia. Her I’ll have if I cannot have the other. Dieu! she is the sweetest thing. If they have cheated me of Louisa, I’ll catch Silvia in my net.”

He dined wolfishly, having eaten nothing all day. He drank fiendishly. He spoke scarce at all to the landlord and his niece, who, though made of rough material, were frightened by his mad mood. Dinner over, he rushed out like a wehr-wolf to drink the black blood of midnight. It was the blackest of nights. He knew his way well enough, but it was a rough way for the fleetest and surest of foot to travel. There was not a light in all Silchester village except one that glimmered—“like a dragon’s eye”—through the leafage of the Seminary Simonet. Nugent paused a moment, wondering who could be awake. Had he clomb the wall and entered,

he would have found the Marquis, imperturbable as Archimedes, deep in a problem, yet quite ready to run through an intruder the Tagus-tempered rapier which hangs within easy reach of his hand. What would the small seminarists, asleep in their dormitories, have thought if they had known Bisclaveret was below their windows? How they would have trembled!

Nugent pushed on and got into the Squire's grounds, and stealthily went round and round the house, treading carefully on turf. No object had he, except to satisfy in some way his wild passion for excitement. Here and there a light glimmered: one where the Squire was reading; one in Silvester's room, though Silvester was not there; one (how it would have maddened Nugent could he have known it!) through an arrow-slit of Louisa's tower, where she and Silvia were having a midnight gossip.

Though Nugent had no object in wandering,

some one else had—to wit, Silvester. Now that he had his lady-love under lock and key, he was resolved to guard her. Having heard of the conspiracy, he feared that all their precautions might not have thrown Nugent off the scent. So, while Silvia was chatting to Louisa, he was quietly patrolling the lawns and gardens—in the right hand an ash sapling, in the left a dark lantern.

There is a great yew hedge at Silchester, with archways cut in it. Walking along the turf on one side of this hedge, Silvester suddenly fancied he heard a step on the other side. He stopped. Yes. Some one was walking carefully yet rapidly. He grasped his bit of ash, walked to the next arch, and there came right on a man whom the bull's-eye revealed to him as—Walter Nugent.

The bright line of light thrown upon his face showed it fiendishly distorted. Behind him the light gave Silvester a glimpse of

level turf and lovely flowers, making him think of the Devil in Eden. All this was instantaneous. Silvester had something else to think about.

Nugent had drawn a revolver.

If two men meet in the dark, and one has a dark-lantern, the other has a poor chance of seeing him. But if that other fires straight at the light, he has a strong chance of hitting the man who holds it. Nugent was on the point of firing, when Silvester, who knew his single-stick, brought the sapling down on his wrist with such force that he dropped the pistol. Maddened with rage, he ran away, Silvester in hot pursuit: but on a perfectly dark night it is hard to overtake a man, and he soon found it necessary to give it up. Returning to Silchester, he found everybody awake and in terror, for the pistol had exploded as it fell—and he was missing. There was a regular hue-and-cry. He told his adventure,

and took Louisa and Silvia, who had actually rushed out in their dressing gowns, to find the revolver. There was "*W. N.*" on a silver plate on the weapon.

"The game begins early," said the Squire. "I must consult with the Marquis to-morrow. Now, children, go to bed."

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Nugent's madness for the time was quelled by the terrible pain he felt. He knew his wrist was broken. He tightened a handkerchief around it as well as he could with his left hand, and crawled with sore weariness to Tom All Alone, and lay on the bench outside until the gates were opened at about six o'clock. The grim landlord was surprised to see his customer there.

"Brandy, for God's sake," said Nugent.

Gridley, though surly, was prompt, and brought it without question.

"I've had an accident," said Nugent; "hurt my wrist horribly. I'm afraid it's broken. What time's the first coach to Exeter?"

"In about half an hour."

"Well, I must go by it, and get doctored. I should have had to go to Exeter to-day in any case. I'll stay here till it comes, and get you to help me up."

"Won't you eat anything?"

"No. More brandy, that's all. Our bargain stands, you know. I shall be back in a day or two."

"All right, sir," said the landlord, inwardly admiring his guest's pluck.

Hurrah! the cheery horn—the four steaming bays—the many-caped coachman—the scarlet-garbed guard—all the glories of the Quicksilver mail that never carried luggage on the roof, and took just three seconds to change horses! Pity such a picturesque machine of travel should ever carry a

scoundrel. It does, on this occasion, and he is in anguish all the way, and pities himself, and blasphemes the Creator. Let us leave him in the hands of his Exeter surgeon.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE WOODS AT MIDNIGHT.

“Is there not some mystery,
Some formless creature haunting woods at night,
That fills you with strange horror, hovering near,
Evading always? What a shuddering whisper
Comes suddenly through stillness absolute,
And how faint flicker of light makes darkness darker!”

NUGENT'S wrist was fractured, but not badly. The skilful surgeon bandaged and splintered it, and in less than a week gave him leave to move about with his arm in a sling. Hence he was in time, as it proved, to meet his detachment at the station: and he was not dissatisfied with their appearance. Stalwart fellows for the most part, grimy and thirsty,—two-thirds Irish; while the surveyor's

clerk, Roberts, who came in charge of abundant surveying machinery, had a sinister look which delighted Nugent inconceivably. Perhaps he was honest; but it is difficult to think so of a man with an abominable squint.

Nugent refreshed them freely at a tavern not far from the terminus; then he told them that they would have a long walk next day to their final quarters, and recommended them to find beds as early as possible, and to muster at the hour of five. They seemed in a state of fair discipline, so he asked Mr. Roberts to come to his hotel and dine and sleep. It was the London Inn. After dinner they had a quiet confabulation.

“I have had an unlucky accident with my wrist, you see, in exploring those Silchester woods,” said Nugent. “It is unfortunate for the moment, but need not much interfere with progress. Now the great thing at first is, not to create suspicion. Those surveying instruments are the difficulty. I have arranged to quarter

the men, and ourselves too, at an old wayside inn which once had a great deal of custom, and now has very little. There are large low rooms where they can eat and drink and sleep all day, and be ready for the work at night. It is just the very point, so far as I can judge from a rough survey of the country, at which the railway ought to enter Silchester Manor, so as to get close to Silchester market-place. I propose that we should walk there; but I don't want to tire the men on so long a spell by making them carry the instruments; and if we were to send them down by the coach, there might be suspicion."

"I had about as much to carry once in Spain," said Roberts, "and a mule did it easily. Could we buy or hire a mule—or even a couple of donkeys?"

"We must buy, not hire—else there may be gossip of where we are going. It is rather late at night to make such a purchase in a cathedral city; but let us light our pipes and

go into the inn yard and talk to grooms and ostlers.”

They went. The yard was busy, for local coaching still prevailed in the district. They treated various denizens of the stables to beer at the hotel tap. They watched weary passengers descend and emerge from stage coaches. They could hear nothing of mules or donkeys from anybody. At last, as they thought of resigning the attempt, and lounged into the tap for another glass, they saw a coalheaver enjoying his beer, and it suddenly occurred to Walter Nugent that mules were largely used for carrying coal through difficult parts of the west country; so he asked this man, who exclaimed,

“Bless ye! my master has threescore mules or more. He’ll sell you a mule—only he likes his price.”

“Can I see him to-night?”

“We’ll go straight to him, if you like. He’s a regular man. He always smokes his pipe at

the Jolly Colliers till twelve, and then goes home and beats the Missus."

They went to the Jolly Colliers, and found this gentleman of regular habits; went thence to his stables, and gave without much haggling about twice its value for the best mule he had; and then went virtuously to bed.

Soon after sunrise the start was made, the surveying apparatus being carefully packed on the mule's back, together with Mr. Roberts's light luggage. Navvies rarely carry much spare apparel; it will usually travel in a red pocket-handkerchief. Over the steep side of the High-moor they trudged, a rough regiment, smoking always, eating often, drinking oftener. It was evening when they came in sight of Tom All Alone.

"I'll go on first," said Nugent. "When you hear my whistle come to the house."

When Nugent reached Tom All Alone, he found the surly landlord in his customary place on the granite bench.

“My men are here,” said Nugent. “Are you ready?”

“Quite.”

“Before they come, one word. Give them plenty to drink, but no brandy in their cider.”

They were soon installed in suitable quarters. The landlord's preparations had been masterly: he knew by instinct what was wanted of him, and had done it well. The men had a low long room at the back of the quadrangle, quite out of the way, in which they could do as they liked; and the landlord confided to Nugent that there was a large cellar under it, in which they could all conceal themselves at an emergency. Nugent and his second in command found a comfortable dining-room and lounging-room, which looked through a low window across the moor to where the road creeps up from Silchester—convenient, as they could note the approach of any one suspicious. Here Harriet supplied them with an excellent dinner; after which Nugent, under pretence of mapping out

the plan of campaign, dexterously sounded Roberts as to his willingness to assist in his design. He soon found that Roberts, if he could gain by it, would not object to assist in any villany.

“You see,” said Nugent, “I should hardly have undertaken this troublesome affair without an ulterior object—though I like the fun of it, and I believe we shall carry it through.”

“That shall we,” said Roberts enthusiastically, “with you for a leader. You are wounded in the cause already.”

“I wish I wasn't: I may want my right hand before it is well. It's no use to grumble; but I never wanted my right hand more than I do now.”

“Your brain will do the work,” said Roberts. “There are plenty of hands to help you.”

“To go back. I'm not short of money, but I love a girl at Silchester, and she loves me, and her father hates me. Now, when we are making our way through the old fellow's woods,

we may find a means of getting at her, and then I want to carry her off. I thought some of our Irishmen would willingly help, for it has always been an Irish maxim that if you love a woman you should take her away at any risk."

"I think they are about right," said Roberts. "I'd do it, if I cared about women, which I don't in the least."

"Well, will you hint what I want to some of the likeliest of these fellows, without letting them know too much? If you can carry out the matter with me, I'm good for a hundred. What do you say?"

"I'm with you," said Roberts, offering his hand, which rather flabbily collapsed under even the left-handed grasp of the other.

The men slept that night, after their long journey, and spent the next day in laziness. Only Roberts, with certain hints furnished by Nugent, went down into Silchester to pick up such information as he could. Nugent himself, his old mad mood only increased by his ill-

luck, sulked and smoked in his den, fiercely awaiting the night.

When Roberts in the afternoon returned, he had not much news for his master. It was one of those sultry afternoons on which country towns fall asleep. There was no customer in any shop. Mrs. Dyer was asleep amid her confectionery; Mr. Taylor's assistant was trying to keep himself awake with draughts of surreptitious soda-water—the corks of which he drew as noiselessly as possible, not desiring to disturb his master's sleep in the parlour behind the shop. Roberts, in search of rumour, went into many places where liquids were sold, and mixed those liquids like a martyr; but the only result was that he awoke several landlords and landladies who were making the day a long siesta, with handkerchiefs over their heads to keep off the flies. Almost the only person he met in Silchester street was the Squire himself—who, spud in hand and Lion

at heel, was striding down the street to confabulate with the Marquis. Roberts knew by the instinct which the cur has towards the bloodhound, that this was some one above him. Nugent found that the day had as yet been wasted.

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But the night. Now they are out in the woods, with masks, dark-lanterns, bludgeons, axes, picks, all sorts of surveying and engineering implements. They travel silently alone the line which Nugent has marked as the best to enter Silchester. Difficult work in the darkness of a wood at midnight: but Roberts carries a compass on which a shaded lamp throws a bright light. These vulgar trespassers disturbed the mysterious silvan loveliness. The sleeping hamadryads shuddered in their dreams as they heard the footsteps of those who were the pioneers of their murder.

Albeit accustomed to such dark work, there was probably no one there save Nugent—born Bisclaveret—who did not feel one or two apprehensive tremors as they passed through the murk vistas. Rough fellows, full of strong drink, and without imagination, they yet saw something to fear in the hollow vault of starless midnight, and the moving branches that touched them on face and hand like living creatures. Not Nugent: he belonged to

“ The splendid fearful herds that stray
By midnight, when tempestuous moons
Light them to many a shadowy prey,
And earth beneath the thunder swoons—”

to quote a young poet of the last new school. On he strode in the van, Roberts hardly able to follow him, and even the bulky navvies thinking he was the most active engineer they ever remembered.

The line of country designed by Nugent led right through the grounds of Silchester,

within a hundred yards of the garden front of the house. When they came to a point above the house, whence on a moonlit night it would have been visible in every chimney stack and buttress and cloister, a master work of English home architecture, Nugent paused. So did his followers, not unwillingly.

“Here, he whispered to Roberts, “so far as I can judge, will be the place for distance signals. From about this point there must be rather a sharp incline to Silchester station.”

Before Roberts could reply, there arose, close at hand, as if they could have touched the person who uttered it, the shrillest saddest strangest cry that ever was heard. It rang through their ears and pierced the farthest woods; it went on and on—but they waited not for the end of it.

“The Banshee!” shouted an Irishman, and there was a panic rush, in which

Roberts was knocked over and his compass-lamp broken.

“Fools! cowardly fools!” said Nugent with an oath. “It was nothing but a screech-owl.”

CHAPTER XVII.

PLOT AND COUNTERPLOT.

“ For he did resolve
To extirpate the vipers
With four-and-twenty men
And five-and-thirty pipers.”

IT was not a screech-owl.
Neither was it the Banshee.

What it was may possibly be revealed by-and-by; but its effect was to scatter the invading forces as effectually as a French army was scattered by German artillery. Nugent's Irish division—his most trusted followers—were mortally frightened, and fled in all ways, being fully convinced they had heard the wail of the spirit that announces

death. The Englishmen, who had heard nothing of the picturesque superstition, were still stricken with terror by so strange a sound in the woods at midnight. Every man made his way as well as he could towards Tom All Alone; but as none of them knew the country, it may be imagined that it was a difficult matter for them to find that lonely inn. Roberts, with smashed compass and a game leg, groped his way thither about sunrise, when he found about half a dozen of the men present. Others straggled in one by one till all but two had arrived: very rueful were their countenances, very tattered were their corduroys; very glad were they to drink and grumble themselves to sleep. As for their weapons, lanterns, pickaxes, implements for surveying, they were all distributed amid the Squire's trampled underwood.

Roberts got some refreshment and tumbled into bed, curtly informing the rather inquisitive

landlord that he had nothing to tell him, and that Mr. Carnac would return by-and-by. Of that worthy, better known to us as Nugent, there is not much to be related. He rushed off at a tangent, and made his way high up through the woods to the moorland. He wandered for hours over the moors, cursing his fates, till he was thoroughly exhausted. Then he slept—he did not know how long, for his watch had run down ; but as he rose from the fragrant turf, both the sun and his hunger told him it was afternoon. He wandered some distance, till he fortunately found a shepherd's hut ; the man had brown bread and fresh milk, and Nugent, having eaten with a wolf's appetite, handed him a sovereign.

“ It's the best meal I ever ate,” he said, “ and worth twice the money. Which is my way to Tom All Alone ? ”

The shepherd showed him the way, and off he went, much refreshed. He felt a strangely strong belief that his next attempt would

succed. He was madder than ever. He built innumerable aërial castles as he strode across the moor; the bright brisk air stimulated him, and even his maimed wrist grew stronger and more pliant. He entered the old inn by a back way—looked in upon the men, who were mostly asleep, and then went to Roberts's room. Roberts had just dressed, and was glad to see his chief.

“We are unlucky, sir,” said Roberts.

“Ill-luck can be turned into good luck, if a man knows the way. Are all the men back?”

“There were two missing this morning.”

“Ah, we must find out about that. Come, we'll order dinner.”

Wherewith he went to the landlord and gave his orders.

“I don't know whether it concerns you,” said Gridley, “but my niece heard down to Silchester there was poachers in the Squire's woods last night, and two was taken.”

“Served them right for poaching before

there are any birds. There are always absurd stories about. Let's have dinner—and the men must want a meal."

Nugent, his energy fully restored—the last flash perhaps of an exhausted spirit—went to the men.

"We shall have another walk in the woods to-night, boys," he said.

But his Irish followers, one and all, declared they could not go into woods where the Banshee cried.

"Eat and drink first," he said, for Gridley and Harriet were entering with a vast joint and jars of beer and cider; "then I'll talk to you."

He left them and dined with Roberts, cheering his depressed subordinate by his easy daring. By-and-by he said to him,

"How many Englishmen have we?"

"Only four."

"Ah, then there are fifteen Irish, now that two are missing. They gave us nineteen to the score."

"That's it," said Roberts.

"Well, will you take the four Englishmen under your lead presently—say about ten—up to the odd pyramid of stones we see from this window. It is an old cairn, a couple of miles from here. There wait, and let them smoke as much as they like, until I join you. I mean to take the Irish right through the woods; and I want to have them alone, to cure them of their ridiculous superstition about the banshee."

"You won't cure them."

"I'll try. I'll bet you ten pounds to one I succeed."

"Done."

They smoked in silence for some time. At last Roberts said,

"Don't you think we are already in some danger?"

"Can you do this sort of thing without danger? I knew it was dangerous when I undertook it, and I told Burley to make you quite understand that."

“He did : but then there is your private scheme.”

“In that nothing has yet been done, so there can be no danger from it. Come, take off the English detachment : I want to teach these poor dear benighted Irish that a screech-owl is not a banshee.”

“It was the loudest screech-owl I ever heard,” said Roberts.

When the English navvies had started for the cairn, Nugent went into the Irishmen, for whom he had ordered a good supply of whisky and hot water. Jolly he found them, and oratorical, but decidedly afraid of the banshee. The spokesman, a stout fellow called Meany, who wore a small brass harp at his battered button-hole, maintained that it would bring them eternal ill-luck.

“The banshee only cries once,” said Nugent. “You can’t hear her again to-night, for the man she cried for must be as dead as English justice.”

Here there was an outcry of "Hurroo !"

"Listen," he continued. "Whisper. I'm an Irishman like the rest of you, but I was born in America, that's the reason I talk badly. I'm a Fenian. I'm for the Green Flag. I believe some of us will live to see a king of our own on the throne of Ireland.

Immense applause.

"Now, boys, why are we here ? Why have I sent away those four Saxons ? I am not down here to do railway business : that's all a pretence. I'm here to rescue and carry away a lovely little Irish colleen that is shut up by her English relations because she has money galore, and they want her to marry their stupid son. She asked me to save her. I mean to do it this night. Will you help me ? If not, I'll go alone."

Nugent's auditors were by this time much in the same frame of mind as the citizens of Rome after listening to Mark Antony. They danced, shouted, sang, stamped, brandished

their shillelahs frantically. Their joy was at its utmost when Nugent gave each a sovereign, and promised more gold when the lady should be rescued. At midnight he led them out in a mood for any deed of violence. He had no plan ; he merely thought he would try to break into Silchester, and to carry poor Silvia away.

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When, on the previous day, Roberts was sent to reconnoitre, he met nobody but the Squire, going down to Simonet's. The Marquis had that morning received a letter from the omniscient Rokes, stating that the marauders were on their way under Nugent, that some attempt would probably be made at once, and that so mad a fellow should be vigorously repressed. Rokes was not sure to a day about their arrival at Silchester. This letter Simonet sent to the Squire, who presently came down to confer with him. At the very gate of the Seminary he met Donald.

“I’ve some news, laird,” said he, “that I want to tell you baith. May I go in with you?”

“Why shouldn’t petticoats go into a ladies’ school?” asked the Squire, laughing, and ringing the gate bell.

“Ah, ye may laugh, but the kilt’s light and breezy, and easy to carry over the heather. Why should braw legs be wrapped in folds of greasy sheep’s wool? But I beg your honour’s pardon.”

“No harm, Donald. Now let Monsieur Simonet and I hear your discovery.”

Donald explained that he had heard from the shepherds on the moor that there were an unusual number of people at Tom All Alone. So he sent little Tom Wray, Mark Wray’s son, a sharp little fellow, to play about on the moor outside, and to run into the courtyard if he saw a chance. He did this, came back unnoticed, and reported to his father and Donald what he had seen—men smoking and drinking in the

back premises that were seldom used, and quantities of heavy tools piled up in a corner.

“Rokes was about right,” said the Marquis.

“Ay, he’s a wonderful fellow. What’s to be done?”

“We ought just to reconnoitre to-night, I think, and try to find out their plans. Your keepers should be instructed. Unluckily, the scoundrels have just the weather to suit them. No moon, and if it does not clear, not a single star.”

“But won’t this fellow attack the Rectory, thinking Miss Saint Osyth is there?”

“He will find out by his spies that she is gone, depend on it. I only hope he may not have found out where she is. He has the demoniac cunning which coincides with spiritual stupidity.”

“If I might have leave,” said Donald, “I think while Mark Wray and the other keepers watch these men, I may manage to frighten them.”

He communicated his scheme. The Squire and the Marquis both laughed heartily.

“You shall try that, Donald,” said Mr. Silchester, “for the very fun of the thing.”

Now comes the revelation. The unearthly screech which appalled these scoundrels was the strongest and most musical note on his favourite bagpipes.

We have seen its success. The keepers took two prisoners, and many examples of the *relicta non bene parmula* in the form of digging and hacking and measuring tools. The prisoners, brought into the Squire's magisterial presence, and charged with trespass, pleaded *guilty*—but said they were engaged by a gentleman called Burley, and sent to Exeter with a gentleman called Roberts, and told to take their orders from a gentleman called Carnac. That was all as they knew. They was navvies by trade, and had to earn their wages.

“Your story seems straightforward enough,”

said the Squire, "but I must remand you till we can find this Carnac or Roberts."

Simonet had been present when the examination was taken, and went into the Squire's rose-garden to talk it over with him.

"That indefatigable scoundrel will try again to-night, depend on it. The point at which Donald encountered them shows that his design is on Silchester. Now the question is, shall we let him come here and baffle him, or shall we take him and his followers at once at the inn?"

"The difficulty in the latter case is that we have so few police, and they are so cautious," said the Squire. "I'd rather catch them in an overt act. They can hardly burn down Silchester."

"No," said the Marquis; "and if you agree to a plan I have, they will be easily dispersed, and this Nugent will be caught."

The plan, being elaborate, took a long explanation.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LADY'S TURRET.

“Towers and battlements it sees
Bosomed high in tufted trees,
Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The cynosure of neighbouring eyes.”

LOUISA remained quiet in her turret, which some ancestral Silchester had built for secrecy and safety, and which later masters of the house had so improved that the most exigent of distressed damozels might well inhabit it till her persecutors were tired of persecuting her. No creature among the servants, save the coachman, had the remotest notion of her being in Silchester at all. Silvia, by fertile contrivance, brought her breakfast

and dinner, and furnished her with all she needed. She did not pine in her prison. Each window of the four had so noble a view that it would be hard to say which was noblest. Moorland lay north, and ample woodland east; westward the river wound between the majestic oaks and elms and chestnuts of the park; and southward laughed the sea.

There had been terror in the turret, but more on the part of Silvia than Louisa. Miss Saint Osyth was of the Artemis type. She rather despised this man, from whom she so often had escaped. Startled she assuredly was by the series of fierce attempts made upon Silchester; she could not help thinking that Nugent had discovered she was at Silchester, —else how should he, who had shown himself passionately desirous to possess her, besiege the place so resolutely? It was only too probable. Silvia wholly agreed with her. Fancy the explosion of the pistol which aroused the whole house, and might have killed Silvester!

Fancy the fright produced when Donald's bagpipes screamed through the dark, even though the girls had been warned to expect it! The turret had witnessed much palpitation of heart—more on the part of Silvia than her friend. What would Silvia have thought if she had known that Bislaveret was now in pursuit of her? To such men it matters not. They have the true feeling of the modern poetaster, who would have been more popular if he had read Baudelaire—

“My want's at the worst : so why should I spare
(Since just such a thing my want supplies)
This little girl with the silky hair,
And the love in her two large eyes?”

Terror in the turret, doubtless, but also a great deal of fun. It may perchance be thought that Silvester paid a visit now and then ; and of course it was quite necessary that Dr. Sterne should come at least once a day to see that the confinement had not injured the pretty prisoner's health. Her mind was “in-

nocent and quiet," but she assuredly could not "take this for a hermitage," unless indeed lady hermits are authorized to hold levées. On the evening of the day when the Squire and the Marquis held their last colloquy, a pleasant quartett party was held in the turret. No need to say who they were. Mocha fragrance pervaded the apartment, and the whole aspect of the room was such that you would not have thought it possible wehr-wolves were likely to yell outside at midnight. Lovely flowers in vases and in pots were placed about the chamber, and an unprejudiced spectator might have been perplexed to say which looked happier, the cavaliers or the ladies. There would be much to say on both sides.

LOUISA.—I am glad you have come to feel my pulse, Dr. Sterne; at least I suppose that is why you came. Does it flutter too much for the situation?

THE DOCTOR.—The diastole and systole are

superbly equivalent. You must have a magnificent organization, Miss Louisa.

LOUISA.—Thanks, Doctor. I like compliments when they don't come from my sweetheart.

SILVESTER.—I like them best when they *do* come from mine; but when do I get any?

SILVIA.—Whom do you call your sweetheart, sir?

SILVESTER.—Ask Miss Louisa Saint Osyth. She is omniscient, and can name the lady.

THE DOCTOR.—A challenge! Now, Silvia, ask, and let it be understood that Silvester will marry the lady named.

SILVESTER.—With pleasure. I will do anything Miss Saint Osyth commands, if I am quite sure she means it.

LOUISA.—A cool condition. How am I to prove I mean it?

SILVESTER.—I'll tell you in verse, if you have patience to listen.

“ Kiss me, beauty, kiss me
If you can and dare !
Do you fear to miss me,
Wandering anywhere,
Unaware
When the wild larks share
Sweet summer air ?

“ Kiss me, darling, kiss me ;
We were made a pair.
Sweetheart, to dismiss me
Were a deed unfair.
So I swear
You for wife I'll wear,
Rathe, ripe, and rare.”

LOUISA.—Well, I suppose there is but one way, you audacious boy. Wait till I am mistress !

THE DOCTOR.—Dreadful threat ! Nobody ever threatens me like that ; but then I'm not a poet, I'm only a surgeon.

SILVESTER.—Don't you remember *Hudibras*, Doctor ?

“ Love's a distemper that will go its
Way quite uncheck'd by rhymes of poets ;
Yet you in Love the best of surgeons see,
When a fair girl is in emergency.”

LOUISA.—I don't remember that in Butler, but still it *may* be there, as I can't remember everything.

SILVIA.—I can't think how you can all laugh and joke so gaily when perhaps we shall be in dreadful distress in half an hour. Only think! it is half-past ten; perhaps that hideous man will have all in his power before midnight.

SILVESTER.—We shall be like Outis and his friend in the cave of Polyphemus, and the delicate monster will be wondering whom to eat first.

THE DOCTOR.—He had better try me. I bristle with lancets, and am well packed with poison phials, and will do my best to disagree with him.

At this point of the conversation Louisa's pretty turret-boudoir was invaded by the Squire and the Marquis.

SILVIA.—O papa! what *is* going to happen?

THE SQUIRE.—Thy father is no prophet; what he hopes will happen is an immediate cup

of coffee. Probably Monsieur le Marquis would have a similar hope, if he thought good coffee could be produced in Silchester—or even in England.

Silvia produced the dainty Parisian apparatus which makes coffee better than any—two glass globes, one over the other, with a spirit lamp beneath, and in a very few minutes some coffee was produced which even the Marquis deemed excellent. When the pleasant badinage which one would connect with coffee in the turret of a country house had exhausted itself, the Squire said,

“Now for serious talk. We are going to take this fellow to-night, ladies, and a considerable row will be made, and that you may not be frightened I shall leave Silvester on guard.”

“I should like to be in the thick of it,” said Silvester.

“No doubt you would—and so you should if there were any real fighting to do; but we are going to capture him on scientific principles,

the joint production of the Marquis and Donald, and you would only be in the way."

"Suppose you don't capture him, Papa," said Silvia.

"Leave that to me," he replied.

"And if you catch him, what will you do with him?" asked Louisa.

"Leave that to me," said Dr. Sterne.

* * * *

Presently the ladies were left alone, with Silvester on guard; rather surly, though in such charming company. Right gladly would he have joined in the *melée*, but from his father he had learnt that obedience which only a loving father can thoroughly teach; and he obeyed him in spirit and in letter. So he stayed quietly with his sister and his lady-love, although it may be imagined that they looked persistently through the windows of the tower, eager for the terrible moment.

It came: oddly enough, it came just as Sil-

vester had made the girls leave the window and drink a glass of wine each, for it was more than an hour past midnight, and nothing but terror kept them awake. It came—in the shape of three explosions which seemed to shake the turret—when, starting up to the window, they saw all the great oaks of Silchester almost as clear as in day, and a rain of fire through the sky, and an apparent scrimmage below—vague shadows of struggle.

“We shall soon know the result,” said Silvester.

At that moment entered the herald of victory—the Marquis. He was black all over.

“We have got him safe,” he said. “I think I’ll take a glass of wine, with your permission, ladies.”

When he had refreshed himself, Louisa said, “Please tell us all about it.”

“There is not much to tell,” said Simonet. “We got stray bits of information as to what the fellow was doing, and learnt that he cer-

tainly planned a midnight attack on Silchester. I suppose he wanted to carry away you two young ladies. Now an old friend of mine, colonel in the army of France, and a great artillerist and pyrotechnist, sent me over a year ago a parcel of rockets of his own invention, designed to light up the darkness and to do injury wherever they drop. I tried one or two on the sea with Donald, and found them perfect; they filled the moonless and midnight air with light, and I dare say grilled shoals of pilchards. To-night we have used these; sent up three from three different points outside the invaders, who were watched through the wood. When the rockets went up you could see every face of them, and such terrified faces I never saw. They seem to be all Irishmen, and the Irish are soon frightened by what they don't understand; so when the keepers collared them they gave in at once. They are all comfortably locked up."

"But Nugent?" exclaimed Louisa and Silvia at once.

"It was the best fun of all. Donald, who had charge of one of my rockets, the moment it burst, looked for Nugent. He ran straight at him, and threw an immense casting-net right over him. There was Nugent, powerless, incapable of using his weapons. Donald took net and all in his arms, like a big fish, and carried him to the stable door, where a carriage and pair was waiting for him."

"A carriage and pair!" exclaimed Silvia.

"Yes," said the Doctor, who, with the Squire, had just entered the room. "I had a carriage and pair waiting to take him to my friend Dr. Fox's asylum at Ringwood; and if he gets out of that I'll give him leave to run away with you."

"This business is well over," said the Squire. "Such a madman might have done frightful harm."

“Ah!” said Simonet, “when will the world learn how to treat its madmen?”

It may here be casually remarked that Roberts and his detachment vanished utterly.

CHAPTER XIX.

SQUIRE AND MARQUIS.

“Plato, methinks, in the *Symposium*,
Makes marvellous Aristophanes become
Author of this romance—
That Zeus created man hermaphrodite ;
That, being severed, wrongly they unite :
Whence, clearly, Lord Penzance.

“There is a sex in soul. What means a *friend*,
But one who all your thoughts can apprehend,
Who loves while he condemns :
Whose fancies blend, and yet are not the same ?
Just as when Oxford’s Isis meets the Thame,
Behold imperial Thames.”

IT would be hard to say who went to bed at Silchester that night. Mrs. Silchester did, but then she always liked a long night, and took all these amazing events with the perfect placidity which through life had distinguished

ner. She was the best wife and most loving mother in the world, but she had a kind of instinctive fatalism which prevented her from possessing nerves or understanding worries. Her life was for the most part what the Turks call *kef*. It could not be said Joan Silchester was torpid—nothing of the kind; she loved the Squire passionately, and would have suffered martyrdom for him; she loved her two children heartily, and right well they knew it. She had been their willing slave in the nursery and many years after: they were her willing slaves now. So seldom did she express a wish that her wishes were always obeyed. It was the same with the management of her household. She left it to a trusty housekeeper; but if at any time anything went so far wrong that she thought fit to interfere, there was terror in the establishment. A word from one who spoke so mildly and so seldom had more power than the sharpest oburgations of others.

This night she went to bed quietly, leaving the excited household to wear itself out. This of course took some time, especially as there were two pair of lovers on the premises. Silvester proposed a scratch supper; and the young folk went and worried the cook and ransacked the larder, and they had the impertinence to bring into the Squire's own sanctum a quantity of cold beef and—fortunate find!—a lobster, and a mighty tankard of his own old ale, brewed at his birth, tapped when he came of age, and now singularly soft and strangely potent.

The Squire was amused.

“These youngsters are invading us, Simonet. What's to be done? Let me show you the way.”

He sliced off a plateful of the cold rump,—thin slices, but many of them,—ate it quickly, and took a mighty drink from the great two-handed tankard.

“There,” he said, “that is my supper, or

breakfast. But you, my dear Marquis, shall have something more delicate. Silvester, cut a few sandwiches, and send up some tokay. The Marquis and I will take possession of Louisa's boudoir, as she is busy to-night."

They ascended to the turret, the Squire just turning to say,

"Remember, that ale is strong."

The Squire and his friend sat opposite each other in Louisa's pretty chamber for some time in silence. Simonet ate his sandwich and sipped his tokay. At length the Squire asked,

"When are you going to France, Simonet?"

THE MARQUIS.—I will reply with a question. When are the two weddings to take place?

THE SQUIRE.—What is the connexion?

THE MARQUIS.—A simple one. Do you suppose I would leave England until I had seen those two lovely little friends of mine, Silvia and Louisa, united to their lovers?

THE SQUIRE.—The romance of youth reappears in age.

THE MARQUIS. — Why should it not ? Romance is imperishable. Still there is nothing very romantic in wishing to see the happy marriage of two lovely girls whom one has known intimately, discovering that they are as lovely in mind as in body. So I adhere to my question.

THE SQUIRE.—The day is not fixed.

THE MARQUIS.—Then fix it.

THE SQUIRE.—You seem as anxious as one of the bridegrooms might be. What will Madame la Marquise say ?

THE MARQUIS.—Early in September would be a good time, if the young folk are ready and the lawyers will permit.

THE SQUIRE. — Lawyers be hanged ! They'll have to do their business fast, or I'll kick them out. What I give Silvia will be her husband's ; let him give her as much as he can afford and she deserves. Why should

I interfere between husband and wife? If I give a man my daughter, am I to begrudge him the paltry money that belongs to her? Why, it would be making your child of less value than gold and silver!

THE MARQUIS.—Your logic is irrefragable, Squire. I most heartily agree with you. But are you prepared to carry it out altogether? For instance, your son, who will be a great landowner when you abdicate—which I hope will be long after my time—is about to marry a young lady with much money. Now you will be too proud to allow such a marriage to occur without settlements.

THE SQUIRE.—I shall leave it to the boy and girl themselves. If they want to be fortified against one another by a Vauban scheme, why, the family lawyer can do it. I shall give him no instructions. Everything shall be settled exactly as they please. But let us have all four of them up, if you like, Simonet,—they are only playing puss in

the corner in my private bookroom,—and question them on the matter.

THE MARQUIS.—A capital notion, but not yet. First I want to make an arrangement with you. I desire to see those two girls wedded, for I have a great liking for them both; and I want them to spend their honeymoon at my château. I must go over in September: fix as early a date as you can; and you and Mrs. Silchester come also. I want to get you over there, if only to make you envy my library.

THE SQUIRE.—You are very kind, my dear Simonet, and I accept at once—even for my wife, who has never been out of England. We will all come, and I will make the young folks marry at the proper date, whether they like it or not. In return, I have a favour to ask of you.

THE MARQUIS.—Granted at once.

THE SQUIRE.—Good. What do you mean to do about the Seminary Simonet? Is it to

go to ruin, and is utter stupidity to be the future fate of the girls of Devonshire?

THE MARQUIS.—It has been rather puzzling myself and my wife. It seems a pity that so useful an establishment should be given up, but we really have no time to find proper people to carry it on. Miss Philbrick, the second in command, could manage for a time, if only we saw a chance of doing any good with it. I'd make her a present of the school, and of money to carry it on, if she were capable; but she is one of those people who can do their work perfectly if told what to do.

THE SQUIRE.—Allow me to make a proposal. Your school has been a great success, because, without personal interference, *you* have been the actual head of it. Women want now and then to be told what to do. I have an idea, with your permission, of endowing that school—which always shall bear its old name,—and of getting a gentleman and lady to manage it—the one to control,

the other to teach. I should like to prolong the memory of your most successful experiment—even if its success is incapable of prolongation. Do you object?

THE MARQUIS.—In nowise. I should be glad to see the thing done again. A woman should never be the final determinant in any matter. They are too much influenced by caprices. My wife knows it, and often asks me the most trivial questions; but that is better than your grave mistakes. If you decide on your endowment, Squire, Miss Philbrick can hold on until the affair is settled, and you get the right sort of master and mistress. And I shall found one or two scholarships and fellowships.

THE SQUIRE (laughing).—How will you manage?

THE MARQUIS.—Easily. A pupil stays five years, let us say. Hold an examination of one-year pupils, and let the successful candidate have her other four years for nothing. That's

the scholarship principle. Hold an examination of the pupils who leave the school at the end of five years. Give the successful candidate fifty pounds a year for the next five. That's the fellowship principle, reduced, of course, for the inferior sex.

THE SQUIRE.—We'll do all that, but if that succeeds I'll do more. I do not see why girls should not have public schools in England as well as in America. I'll turn your seminary into the noblest girls' school of England, and sēt your statue in front of it.

THE MARQUIS.—Thank you. The young ladies will think it is an illustration of the Darwinian theory. But now, as it is getting late, shall we call up these young people, and examine them on the question of marriage settlements?

The Squire concurred, and rang the bell, which Silvia answered.

“I want you four lovers upstairs,” he said. They came.

“Doctor, where are your patients?” asked the Marquis; “or where will they be if you play hot-cockles and blind-man’s-buff at this hour of the night?”

“We are going to have a little game, Doctor,” said the Squire. “I want you first, because you might have a mad messenger rushing up to say Polly Ward’s baby had tumbled out of bed. Louisa, take Silvia and Silvester into the next room, out of hearing. I put you on your honour not to listen.”

“A capital idea,” said the Marquis.

“A question has arisen between Simonet and me,” said the Squire, “about marriage settlements. Suppose you marry Silvia, which you seem to mean to do, and I have some little money to give her, should you deem it best for me to settle it upon her or to give it to you?”

“In our case,” said the Doctor, slightly flushed by the conversation and by previous excitement, “it would not matter in the least. In any case, if the marriage is a complete one,

the husband should manage all money matters. But ask Silvia. I abide by her decision."

"Good," said the Marquis.

"I'll take leave now," said the Doctor, "without seeing the young ladies again. I have a heavy day to-morrow, and want to be up early."

"Be sure you come to dinner, Sterne," said the Squire.

Then he summoned Silvester.

"This is a game of *one* question," he said to his son. "Don't answer hastily. You, with a great estate coming to you when I die, which I don't mean to do just yet, are about to marry Louisa, who has a lot of money. What is your opinion about marriage settlements in such a case?"

"I am happy to say," said Silvester, "I have never considered the question; but, being of lazy temperament, I think I should like all the property, mine also, settled on her. You see she could not well let me starve."

"You are too fond of irony," said the Squire.

"Am I to be serious? Well, in our case it matters nothing. We are one. In such a case, to save trouble, I should say—*No settlements*. But I hope there is no attorney in hearing, or I shall be assassinated."

"Be off," said the Squire, and summoned Silvia.

"O dear," she said promptly, "please give everything to John. I couldn't be troubled with it."

Last came Louisa, to whom the question was also put.

"Dear Papa," she said, "I should be unhappy with independent property. I have thought about it a great deal. I want Silvester to take all that is mine, and manage it as he likes. Of course I shall ask him to keep a balance at some bank for me, just for trifles. But I should be ashamed to have anything of my own that was not under

his control. I am his: so all that I have is his."

"You are a wise child," said the Squire.

"I try to be," she said, "but Silvester is wiser than I."

"You shall be married in a month, you minx," said the Squire. "See, there is sunrise. Let us have some breakfast, Simonet. Louisa, you can get it for us, I am sure."

It was a dissipated morning. Breakfast took rather a mixed form. Silvester foraged again in the larder, as often he had done in his hungry boyhood, and found a splendid piece of bacon, and no end of eggs. A fire was lighted in Louisa's boudoir, a frying-pan found, some herbs chopped, an omelet made. Silvester cut the bacon in slices, and toasted them till the end of his nose resembled a red-hot iron poker. There have been better omelets, and bacon more deftly fried; but these went well, and the Squire, after a mighty draught of ale, said,

“One of the best breakfasts I ever had.”

“It is rather early for breakfast, Papa,” said Louisa.

“Then call it supper,” said the Squire.
“Silvester, find my hat and spud. I’m going over to Mount St. Nicholas to see Donald.”

CHAPTER XX.

IN EDINBURGH.

“I view yon Empress of the North
Sit on her hilly throne.”

THE result of the Squire's visit to Mount St. Nicholas was that Musical Willie's faithful henchman started that very day for Edinburgh, taking the morning coach to Exeter, to bring his beloved master home again. Donald had never delighted so much in any mission. Although the mighty Highlander despised Lowlanders, yet he revered the gift of song which his master possessed. He was wont to soliloquize :

“Nairn's a Highland county. The Nairns

came from there of old, I warrant. Ah, he could not make songs like that if he were not of Highland blood. [It is not thought necessary to write *I'se warrant*, or *werena*, or *Hieland bluid*.] There was one Walter Scott, a Lowlander they say, who wrote well enough ; but I like the laird's style better. Faith, I'll back him for a good song against any man betwixt Tweed and the Grampians."

And then, if Donald were soliloquizing on the sea-shore, he would strike up on his bagpipes the old air that goes to

"The lasses o' the Canongate,
O they are wondrous nice !
They winna gie a single kiss
But for a double price."

The Highlander reached Edinburgh safely rather late in the evening of his second day's journey. He was resolved to find his master at once, so strode straight away to Messrs. Blackwood's, whereto his master's letters had been forwarded. He was just in time to

obtain information : Musical Willie was lodging in Gavenlock's Land, but would likely be at Ambrose's just now. Thither went Donald, and found him enjoying a lively chat with some friends who were going to sup with him. He was surprised; excused himself to his friends; took Donald into a private room, and learnt all that had happened.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed, "I'll go home again to-morrow."

"Thank God for that too!" said the Highlander.

When Willie told his friends that Donald was his faithful servant and friend, they insisted that he should sit down and sup with them. He relucted, but there was no escape.

"You can't resist a haggis, my lad," said Dr. Laidlaw, the best scholar and the maddest wag in Dun-Edin. "And that's not all,

'We'll gie ye the lang kail parritch,
And bannocks o' barley-meal;
We'll gie ye the gude saut herring
To relish a cog o' gude ale.'"

Donald stayed: he afterwards confessed that it was the most marvellous night he had ever passed. Nights in Silchester woods or on Mount St. Nicholas Shore in search of Walter Nugent were nothing to it.

“Hech! to hear their talk. Why, they know everything. And their jokes! They played with words and fancies as a juggler at a wake does with brass balls and swords. They laughed at each other till the windows shook.— They sang songs in Latin and Greek and French and Scotch—besides the vulgar-tongue of England. They drank whisky punch—Lord forgive me! I don’t know how many big china bowls;—and when we came away, after the laird had sung his last song, he walked down George Street steadier than any of us. And, just think, the sun was up.”

Many a time thereafter did Donald talk of this wonderful supper, boasting his master’s prowess at haggis and punch and song. Willie indeed had been amazingly brilliant,

for a load was off his mind, and he longed to go home and thank his helpful friends. He had determined to start to-morrow—more accurately, *to-day*; and his final song was a farewell:—

“Farewell, farewell to Scotland!
Dear land I love the best;
I'm off and away from Forth and Tay
To rivers of the west—
To rivers of the west, my friends,
Where salmon are small and few,
But the lasses thereby have a merry eye—
And I'm in love with two.”

“You bigamous minstrel!” interjected Dr. Laidlaw.

“Ay, and unpatriotic too,” exclaimed Patrick Scott. “He deserves to go into exile.”

Willie, who had wisely occupied the interval with whisky punch, resumed:

“Farewell, farewell, dear Edinbro’!
Of cities maiden Queen;
O I love thee well, and fain would dwell
Where thy fair towers are seen—

Where thy fair towers are seen, dear town,
Where blooms the sweet white rose,
But I cannot stay, for ever and aye
The piercing east wind blows."

"You ruffian!" ejaculated Laidlaw. "To abuse the Edinburgh east wind! Why, it's one of our most cherished institutions—the only thing keener than the *Edinburgh Review*."

Willie continued, and concluded :

"Farewell, farewell, my dear old friends !
Farewell the rich delight
Of Latin and Greek and wit unique,
And whisky punch all night—
And whisky punch all night, dear boys,
And pen and ink all day—
On a western shore, being forty and more,
I go to fast and pray."

"Don't come back to Edinburgh," said Scott, "after that song. *You* fast and pray!"

"Don't you see?" said Laidlaw. "He's going to live fast and look for prey."

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Willie returned with Donald more promptly than anybody expected. His first visit was to Silchester, where everybody rejoiced to see him again. When the Squire had an opportunity, he said,

“I hope you think we have done rightly.”

“Very rightly indeed, and I am most thankful to you all.”

“You have heard of our coming marriages I suppose, and that Simonet has turned out a marquis in disguise?”

“O yes; Donald has told me most matters, so far as he understood them.”

“We are all going to Simonet's château, where the young folk are to spend their honeymoon. Will you also come? I ask in Monsieur le Marquis's name, for we both agree it will do you a world of good after all your recent worry.”

“I shall be in the way of the mellilunatics,” said the lover of dactyl and spondee.

“Not a whit. You and the Marquis and

I will rummage the library and fish the Loire. You can't refuse. The library is rich in old manuscripts that nobody has ever read."

Willie was conquered.

CHAPTER XXI.

HYMENEAL.

Quis deus magis ancsiis
Est petendus amantibus ?
Quem colent homines magis
Coelitum, O Hymenae Hymen,
Hymen O Hymenae ?

Ἕμην ὦ, Ἕμέναι ὦ, sang the famous Athenian from whom Catullus of Verona caught the hint of his delicious marriage song. We have among us at present a school of writers who descend to very carnal details, and occasionally appeal to Greek and Latin poets as authorities on their sides. Catullus especially, a gentleman who died about forty years before the birth of Christ, who lived in the city of Rome when it

was maddening with the despotism of the world under Julius Cæsar, who was a hot-blooded aristocrat with no philosophy, is quoted as an exemplar.

“As Catullus wrote, so I may write,” urges the impuissant poetaster.

Would that he could do it! Yet, while there are the grossnesses of his time in Catullus, there were also purities, high and soft and sweet, which his English imitator has no knowledge of. Take two stanzas of this nuptial song:

“Iam licet uenias, marite,
Vxor in thalamo tibi est,
Ore floridulo nitens
Alba parthenice uelut
Luteumue papaver.”

Again :

“Torquatus uolo paruulus
Matris e gremio suae
Porrigens teneras manus,
Dulce rideat ad patrem
Semihiante labello.”

They are untranslatable. They are loving

and pure—tenderly sweet as a rose-garden in moonlight. If the versifiers who, forgetful of the lapse of centuries, plead classic example for loathsome nastiness, could think thoughts like these, they would burn all their abominations, and stand in sackcloth and ashes to be scourged for having committed them. On second thoughts, the sackcloth should be put on after the scourging.

Marriage, considered as it should be, is the absolute acme of life. There is true poetry in it, and in the virgin love which precedes it: but that preceding virgin love is only a faint foreshadowing of the complete union of soul with soul, self with self, each self merging utterly in the other self. Nausikaa is not Penelopeia.

Two are one.

That is the eternal enigma solved by marriage. Many of our contemporary thinkers, poetic and prosaic, have set forth theories about marriage; but none seems to have under-

stood that marriage is imperfect unless the man sees in his wife himself. She is as much a part of him as his hand or his eye. She is one with him. Where there is true marriage, divorce is impossible. Where there is false marriage, divorce is certain—without legal interference.

The sweet September day came when Silvia Silchester and Louisa Saint Osyth were to learn the great secret—a secret greater far than that of death. Death puts you in the hand of God, and you are safe: marriage puts you in the hand of man—or of woman. It is too late in our story to set forth a theory on this topic; but there is one full fathom-deep in the author's brain.

September is a lovely month, if it rains not too much. On this day there was perfect purity of weather. The two brides had a dozen bridesmaids between them—young ladies from the county families within a hundred miles or so, with whom the Silchesters had been affiliated for centuries. There were

two, however, from the Seminary Simonet, whom we have already met at Silchester, and there were Aurelia and Kitty Selfe, whose curious romance may yet be narrated at greater length.

We conduct our weddings rather absurdly. There is a legend that their solemnization before noon was designed to make certain the sobriety of the parson and clerk, as well as of the parties chiefly concerned. Such a regulation is in these days rather out of date. Few persons intoxicate themselves early in the morning, whatever they may do late at night. What can be wearier than a wedding-day to those who attend the ceremony and breakfast, when bridegroom and bride are gone, and the part of Hamlet is cut out of the play? What can be wearier than for the bride and bridegroom to rush many miles away to some place they care nothing about, with an immense quantity of luggage labelled—

ROMEO MONTAGU, ESQUIRE,

High Street, Verona ;

Passenger to Nephelococcygia :

and to pass their first night in some villanous inn, where the sheets are damp and the wine is Hamburgh? Marry just before midnight, and spend your honeymoon at home.

Great gaiety was there in Silchester on the day of the double wedding. The Squire made it thoroughly festal. No work was done, and many gifts were given. The High Street and market place were alive with banners and decorations. The little seminarists had holiday of course, and even stern Dr. Harris made concession to the double event, and allowed his youngsters to go to church if they liked. Few of them did ; of those who did the names are not known.

The church was thronged. Those who criticized carefully the appearance of the bridegrooms held that Dr. Sterne looked

younger than heretofore, and that the young Squire looked older. Natural results of marriage. We all know the melancholy French adage, very French, indeed—*Si jeunesse savait, si vieillesse pouvait*. The marriage of completion gives wisdom to youth and power to age.

The arrangement made by the Squire was that the marriage should be as late as possible, and that everybody should come home to the festival, and that both couples should sleep at Silchester. Not till next day were they to travel, and then by easy stages. So in the great hall of Silchester there was a mighty banqueting at about one; and then they strolled out into the grounds, where an ox had been roasted whole, and many tents erected, and everything done *à la Camacho*, and then they flirted in the bowling-green while the Squire and the Marquis played, the Marquis actually winning, and then they had some rustic comedy presented, with a lineal de-

scendant of Bottom the weaver as chief actor ; and then they returned to the great hall, where a noble supper was ready—boar's head, swan stuffed with partridges, sturgeon a yard long, carp immense that had lain in the Silchester ponds for a century,—above all, the peacock. All was brought in with ceremony ; the *caput apri defero* was not forgotten, but the supreme dish, the peacock, whereby loyal knights vowed as Zeus vowed by Styx, came in borne by two pages and preceded by a third, who sang—

“Whoso swears by me,
Swears true ;
Else I verily fear that he
Will rue.

Mine is Knighthood's, oath !
Once sware,
A King who fought France and Scotland both—
' *I dare !* '

Dare to do the right !
Dare this—
Then shall you have, some happy night,
One kiss.”

Supper was grand—would its historian could thoroughly describe it. Everything was on a colossal scale, and there was the strongest ale flowing that anybody ever drank. For all that, there was a capacity for country dances when the hall was cleared ; and really I think “ Sir Roger de Coverley ” takes off the fervour of the brain pretty fast. It is a capital de-alcoholist.

At midnight—to the moment—for it was at the last stroke of the great clock—entered a minstrel. He might have been the “ Last Minstrel ”—but, as Sir Walter has disposed of that gentleman, he was probably the last but one. He sang—a bad habit with minstrels :—

“ Ladies in bower
And knights in hall !
Lo, there's an hour
Awaits you all.
Here are two brides
Blushing full red :
What care besides ?
See them to bed.

“ Custom right old,
Custom right good !
Fools may be cold,
Girls will be wooed.
These have been wooed--
These have been wed :
Girls rosy-hued
See them to bed.

“ See them to bed !
Knightly and pure- -
Maidens that wed
Well may endure.
Here have we fair
Sacrament said ;
Love's truth is there--
See them to bed.”

This mad rhyme (Silvester's probably) was
chanted, and to bed they all went.

CHAPTER XXII.

LE CHÂTEAU DE LA ROCHE SIMONET.

“She stands like some Greek Lady of the Skies
In marble cut for millions to admire.”

LET us leave to Lethe all the troubles of travel. Our party of nine at last reached the château. The Marquis had beforehand given ample notice of what he required. They were amazed at the exquisite beauty of the place, at the builder's wonderful daring. For the château is in two divisions, one on each bank of the Loire; and the river is crossed by a bridge of curious architecture, whereupon the famous library was built. On each side the windows of this noble room open

on a wide balcony with a stone balustrade: these balconies being in fact the footways of the bridge, affording communication from one half of the château to the other. Perhaps some such bridge once connected the two parts of King Arthur's famous castle at Tintagel.

In this superb and spacious room there are two tiers of windows, the upper part resembling the clerestory of a church; a wide gallery runs round it, the iron rail of which is in the manner of Quintin Matsys, and has been attributed to that famous artificer. Books in regal bindings line the walls from the parqueted floor to the open oaken-raftered roof; they seem to smile on you through the clear glass, inviting you to communion with the choicest spirits of the past. Prospero would have prized this library above a dozen dukedoms. The Marquis had spent his youth in it; he returned as from exile to this delicious realm, this happy island of Loire; it delighted him

to show his wife and his guests the priceless treasures of his literary domain.

As for Madame la Marquise, she bore her unexpected honours easily, and became at once a perfect châtelaine. There was a complete organization of service throughout the château, so that no difficulties beset her. Every order was executed as if the slaves of Aladdin's lamp had been her servitors. Indeed few orders were needed; an admirable major-domo arranged everything; a *cordon bleu* of the first force invented every day a breakfast that was a lyric, a dinner that was an opera of Rossini's.

The higher part of the château is on the left bank of the Loire, and is not unlike our own Warwick, many of its chambers being walled by the rock itself. Here there is the picture gallery, a superb room overlooking the river, and contrived to serve as a banqueting hall when Monsieur le Marquis de la Roche Simonet entertains a stately assemblage. On the right

bank the buildings lie lower, amid gardens of Elysian beauty, turfen terraces, bosky alleys, ever-sparkling fountains, ancient trees of many kinds, nobly grown, looking like pavilions of summer. Here there are suites of rooms for numerous visitors. The Squire and his wife had the place of honour—the royal apartment, which some former Marquis had fitted up to receive the Grand Monarque. All had their separate rooms; and a dozen more bridal parties might have found ample space. As for Musical Willie, he had a turret all to himself; its lowest storey a square cloister, opening on a quiet angle of garden. There in his occasional melancholy moods he could loiter alone, murmuring to himself a saddened romanzetta.

O happy time! that time of old
 When many a joy was known to me,
 When earth was bright with hues of gold,
 Ere life had lost its ancient glèe.
 Those merry thoughts of olden time,
 Those youthful hopes can ne'er return :
 How mournfully the echoes chime
 Of those sweet hours for which I yearn.

Still sings the lark in upper air,
Still chants the thrush on willow spray,
The golden summer still is fair,
The brooklet murmurs on its way :
But ah, no more a light is shed
O'er the green hill and glimmering sea,
The happy heart of youth is fled,
Nor ever can return to me.

A delicious retreat for mellilunatics and oinogynobibliomaniacs—for lovers of the lyric and the lotos. Vain the attempt to describe the charmed life which the Marquis and his friends lived during this happy autumn. Such pleasures must end. The thought should intensify our enjoyment, making us use them with a wise serenity. “Violent delights have violent ends.” The truly contented spirit resembles the sundial, whose motto is “*Non numero horas nisi serenas.*”

Louisa and Silvia, standing together one sultry night on the balcony of the bridge, watching the full moon upon the rushing river, exchanged confidences, and confessed that they were happy. Such confidences are not for

the vulgar black and white of ink and paper ; they are written in rose-tint on lovely cheeks, in tear-diamonds on happy eyes. Yet Silvester, coming on the ladies suddenly, declared that he would put their conversation into an idyl.

“How will you know it?” asked Louisa.

“The moon has already told me. You should not let her hear your secrets ; she is the most garrulous of gossips.”

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“We will have that college at Silchester, Simonet,” said the Squire. “I shall begin to build as soon as I get home. There’s a capital site that I remember ; and in the meantime the new principle can be applied at your place. What reminded me of it was that among the letters forwarded this morning was one from an old friend of mine, a Fellow of All Souls, asking if I could do anything for a very able young man called Townsend, who has taken a very high degree, but who will not become a

clergyman by reason of certain scruples. His father, who is a man of fortune, might not have discarded him for this only, but he has committed the additional crime of marrying his sister's governess, who is described as a lady of quite unusual erudition. Now as my friend Dr. Rolston is a good judge of character, I take it that this young couple will just suit us, and, if you approve, I will offer them the position by this post. I should, of course, explain to Rolston exactly what our scheme is, and request him not to make the offer unless he is satisfied that Townsend and his wife are capable of carrying it out with efficiency."

"I think the notion capital, if Townsend's heresy is not tremendous enough to shock the parental mind."

"It seems rather mild, so far as I understand it; but you know heresy is growing fashionable."

"I am sorry for it. Fashion is all very well in dress, but I detest it in science, literature,

and religion. It destroys ideas by the manufacture of baseless notions ; it destroys style by introducing affectations ; it destroys purity of faith by making orthodoxy depend on trifles. I hate it.”

Whoso visits Silchester at this time may see the handsome college which the Squire built, and which he and the Marquis endowed. It looks very much as if Maudlin had been removed from the banks of Cherwell and set down in Devon. Dr. and Mrs. Townsend have made it a famous institution ; and it has been noticed that its girl-graduates seldom turn out strong-minded women.

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It is the last night at the château ; the Marquis and his wife are obliged to let their guests depart on the coming day. The festivities have been greater than usual, to keep up everybody's spirits, especially those of the Marquis, who, though glad to return to his beloved

Loire, knows he will sorely miss his Devonshire friends. The major-domo has illuminated the gardens and fountains; at intervals a rocket bursts from the dim woodland, and drops its versicoloured shower upon Loire's enchanted waters; while unseen, and not too near, a band of skilful performers play the liveliest of opera airs.

"Who could be glum with all this joyance of music and light and perfume?" said Willie. "Ah, it is only in France that you can make such scenes perfect. I am not astonished that our unhappy Mary Stuart was sorry to leave this lovely land, and to sojourn among puritanic Scots."

"I shall try what I can do to astonish the Marquis when he comes over to see us next year," said the Squire. "We have come to an agreement that we spend a month at least with each other on alternate autumns. Don't you think Donald's bagpipes will beat all this fine music?"

“ Ah, they did once,” said Simonet, “ and my rockets were rather effective. I wonder when we come over next year how many pretty babies will want *parrain et marraine*. The Marquise and I are quite ready for the office.”

Everybody laughed, and one or two perhaps blushed.

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“ What a lovely spot ! ” said Louisa to Silvester, as she stood at her chamber window in the moonlight, loth to leave it. “ And how well does Monsieur Simonet suit it, though he passed so many years in mere drudgery.”

“ He lifted his drudgery into an art,” said Silvester. “ My father was telling me that in his youth he knew an *émigré* of high rank who could find nothing to do in England but to open a cook-shop, in the days before restaurants were invented ; it was in some small London street, and was frequented by working

men, who used to say they liked it—because old Frenchy was a gentleman.”

“Well,” said Louisa, with a sigh, “I am sorry to leave this, but I shall be glad to get home. For I suppose I must call Silchester home now.”

“Yes, Mistress Silchester. There is your home, and I am your master, and I hope you will be as obedient and loving as you are clever and lovely.”

The travellers reached Silchester without misadventure. Now that the railway is open, I hope to visit them there.

THE IDYL OF THE BBIDGE.

LOUISA.

Well, child, what do you think,
As we stand here under the moon,
As we list to the river's tune,
Are you glad to have passed the brink—
To have given yourself away?
Blush a rose-red blush, and say.

SILVIA.

Sister, the world is new,
And the moon is a marvel above,
And the river sings love, love, love.
So *I* think—— What think *you*?
I know full well, for clear
In your eyes is a diamond tear.

LOUISA.

Will love be a truth or a toy—
A dream of the sweet girl-time
To be sung in a careless rhyme,
Or an endless absolute joy?
Will it last when we all are old,
And life's romance is told?

SILVIA.

When the moon is dead in the sky,
And the river no more flows past,
Still our love shall last, last, last.
'Tis a spirit—it cannot die.
You your bright tear have shed;
I have blush'd my blush, and said.

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